



# Perils of Pandemic

UNHEARD STORIES FROM THE STREETS



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## INTRODUCTION OF THE PEOPLE'S COMMISSIONERS

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

COVID-19 hit India four years ago. While the virus wreaked havoc across the country, mismanagement in handling the pandemic and poor implementation of policies were all it took for a health crisis to turn into socio-economic disaster. Those from the working class and unorganised sector bore the brunt of the impacts.

This report by the Peoples Commission and Public Inquiry Committee (PC-PIC) analyses the lives of street vendors in Delhi and the continuing impacts of the pandemic on their lives, through public hearings conducted in collaboration with Hawkers Joint Action Committee (HJAC) in Kalkaji, Karol Bagh and Jwala Nagar.

The first nationwide lockdown, unilaterally taken and announced by the Union government, proved fatal and the most vulnerable sections of the country were left in the dark with no guidance or prompt and consolidated relief measures to help alleviate the distress caused by the government's abrupt announcement and forced implementation of a lockdown.

2014 Street Vendor Act estimate that street vendors and hawkers constitute up to 2.5% of the population of a city. Despite their indispensable contribution to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the community struggles to live by the rights guaranteed to them by the Constitution of India. Despite the implementation of the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014, Town Vending Committee (TVC) members assert time and again that even as vendors with powers granted to them under the Act, they are constant victims of harassment and neglect, and find themselves unable to exercise their rights.

The misery faced by the community increased tenfold during the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns as the government chose the path of a police state instead of a welfare state. A complete lockdown on democracy was witnessed, and police-citizen conflicts, reinforced by a caste-class bias, doubled. The police force, empowered by Disaster Management Act (DMA) and the Essential Services Maintenance Act (ESMA), acted according to their whims and fancies, justifying their atrocities by vilifying the informal workforce as 'lockdown breakers' and 'corona spreaders'. Street vendors, who returned to vending when the lockdown was lifted, continued to be victims of relentless harassment by the police for being 'corona spreaders' and 'encroachers'.

Street vendors are often only looked as a particular class category. This report looks at the caste composition of street vendors, and it finds that the Dalit and OBC vendors have faced the massive brunt of the effects of the pandemic.

The Union government announced the PM Street Vendors AtmaNirbhar Nidhi (PM SVANidhi) loan on 1 June 2020 to aid street vendors, five months after the first case was reported. During the interim Union Budget for 2024–25, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman mentioned that 78 lakh street vendors benefitted from this scheme, and among those, 2.3 lakh vendors received credit for the third time. Here, let us revisit the

Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs' report of 2 February 2022, and reexamine the numbers the government has been reporting since December 2023 with respect to this 'flagship initiative'. **As reported, the scheme was announced on 1 June 2020, and since then, it took two years for the Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs to identify 49.48 lakh street vendors as per their report of February 2022. On 5 December 2023, the Ministry stated that the beneficiaries of the scheme totalled 56.58 lakh street vendors, and just two months later, in February 2024, the Finance Minister proudly announced in the interim budget that 78 lakh street vendors have benefited from the scheme. The question that needs asking here is where the numbers are being pulled from—30 lakh extra people who benefitted from the scheme in a span of two years from 2022 to 2024—when it took the Ministry two years, from the announcement of the scheme in 2020, to simply identify the total number of street vendors. When the math doesn't add up, who is lying? The Finance Minister, the Housing Minister or the data itself?** With General Elections knocking on the country's door, these tall claims are curiously timed, but remain unbacked by solid verifiable data or accountability.

While the government boasts of people-centric governance, achievements, and success of the PM SVANidhi scheme among street vendors, stories from the ground prove that the reality is starkly different. Four years into the pandemic, vendors and their struggles continue to be sidelined. When the government fails to care for the vulnerable sections of the society, it is important to challenge those actions and ensure to hold those responsible, accountable.



# INTRODUCTION

It has been four years since COVID-19 was first reported in India. On 24 March, 2020, two and a half months after the first COVID-19 case was documented, the country came to a standstill as the Prime Minister announced a 21-day strict nationwide lockdown. While the lockdown was implemented to contain the spread of the virus, the unexpected announcement and poor planning from the government's end was all it took for a health crisis such as COVID-19 to turn into a socio-economic and humanitarian disaster.

While strict lockdown measures were put in place, severely restricting travel and mobility, the Union government did not take any consolidated or timely action to aid the lives of people who were inevitably affected by it. People (migrant labourers, students, etc.) were stranded on the roads with no arrangements of transportation or aid to help them return to their home states. The crack down on movement and travel also led to massive livelihood losses for several sections of the society. Those in the informal sector bore the maximum brunt of these restrictions. Repeated lockdowns had a severe impact on the lives of those employed in the informal sector, including street vendors who couldn't continue vending under the restrictions and were left with no income or savings. Their future was bleak and they had no clarity on how to sail through the sudden crash in the economy. Four years into the pandemic, nothing much has changed and they continue to reel from the negative impact of the government's mismanagement of the pandemic, as well the economic impacts of successive lockdowns.

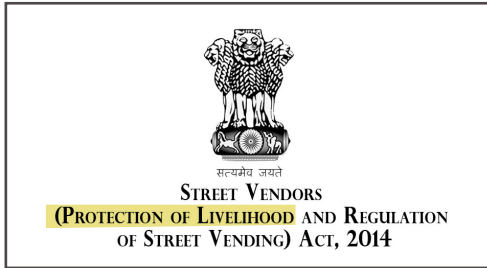
## ***How were street vendors affected?***

India has a substantial number of street vendors. A report published by the Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore, states that as per government estimates, 14% of the total urban informal employment is taken up by street vending<sup>1</sup>. They are an integral part of the urban economy and make significant contributions to India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). According to the Union Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry (February 2022), 49.48 lakh<sup>2</sup> street vendors have been identified in India. According to media reports, it is estimated that there are around 4,00,000–5,00,000<sup>3</sup> vendors and hawkers in Delhi. However, according to the survey conducted by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi in 2021, only 76,301 vendors were identified in the capital city.

1 [https://www.iimb.ac.in/turn\\_turn/street-vendors-policy-support-aid-recovery-market.php#:~:text=As%20per%20government%20estimates%2C%20street,areas%20searching%20for%20economic%20opportunities](https://www.iimb.ac.in/turn_turn/street-vendors-policy-support-aid-recovery-market.php#:~:text=As%20per%20government%20estimates%2C%20street,areas%20searching%20for%20economic%20opportunities)

2 <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/nation/49-48-lakh-street-vendors-identified-in-india-government-366768>

3 <https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/delhi-news/mcd-to-conduct-fresh-census-of-street-hawkers-and-vendors-in-delhi-project-expected-to-take-six-months-101692641479236.html>



**Title of the street vendor Act | Photo credits: vivacepanaroma**

The livelihood of street vendors depends on going outdoors to sell their products. However, during the pandemic, they were left with no option but to stay indoors, specifically during the lockdowns. No government relief measures were announced to help them through this time of crisis and a vast majority of them struggled to feed their families. A report by the Peoples Commission & Public Inquiry Committee (PC-PIC), which looked at and analysed health notifications issued for Delhi by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW), Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA), and Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) to tackle the pandemic and address people's concerns, found that no notifications on health were issued by any of the institutions specifically for street vendors<sup>4</sup>. Additionally, a report by the Indo-Global Social Service Society (IGSSS) that analysed the government policy for informal sector workers during the nationwide lockdown found that there was hardly any social security ensured during the first countrywide lockdown<sup>5</sup>.

4 <https://covidtruths.in/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Shambolic-governance.-Unfiltered-loot-The-story-of-pandemic-governance-in-the-national-capital-documented-through-government-notifications-and-peoples-stories.pdf>

5 [https://almashines.s3.dualstack.ap-southeast-1.amazonaws.com/assets/media/files/266\\_1589448571\\_ea890eae22012ec9a26754493b8cfacbf.pdf](https://almashines.s3.dualstack.ap-southeast-1.amazonaws.com/assets/media/files/266_1589448571_ea890eae22012ec9a26754493b8cfacbf.pdf)



**Delhi Police personnel patrol through Okhla Sabzi Mandi, New Delhi, March 26, 2020.  
Photo credits: Biplov Bhuyan/HT Photo**

The government's lackadaisical attitude towards street vendors—a community that was trying to rebuild their lives from the aftermath of the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns—was further exposed in 2023, when mass forceful evictions were reported in multiple parts of Delhi owing to the G20 Summit that was being held in the city<sup>6</sup>.

Most of these evictions were carried out without providing vendors with any alternative recourse. Forced to fend for themselves, the community received no empathy from authorities as their shops were demolished and they were asked to vacate. These evictions were part of the beautification drive for G20 summit. This slew of demolitions and evictions are eerily similar to those the vendors faced during the Commonwealth Games in 2010.

During the pandemic itself, as their only source of livelihood was affected, street vendors were forced to turn to moneylenders. As a result, they currently face spiralling debts. Furthermore, they are constant victims of harassment by the police and Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) officials. The harassment they face is a direct violation of the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014. Incidentally, the Act takes precedence over the Delhi Municipal Corporation Act, 1957, and the Delhi Police Act, 1978—chapter 7 of the Act (prevention of harassment) explicitly states that vendors who follow the terms and conditions of the certificate of vending cannot be prevented from carrying out their right to vend by any police or local authority in any manner.

The Act, while quite powerful, exists only on paper. It is worth noting that it has almost been a decade since the Street Vendors Act (2014) was enacted by the government. One wonders what the purpose of the Act is if it doesn't benefit vendors and can't protect them during a crisis. As is elaborated in this report, even the Town Vending Committees (TVC), a government-constituted regulatory body created to protect the rights of vendors, have failed to secure the livelihoods of street vendors who continue to face oppression and systemic challenges.

This plight of vendors is not exclusive to Delhi as similar stories have been reported from other states. Vendors continue to await justice and accountability for harassment, increased debt and distress, illegal evictions and implementation of the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014.

### ***Welfare schemes for street vendors***

On 1 June, 2020, as part of the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) announced the PM SVANidhi scheme, a micro-credit facility that provided affordable loans to street vendors in the wake of the pandemic. The scheme aimed to empower street vendors by not only helping them get loans but to also help them resume their businesses in respective urban, peri-urban and

6 <https://theprint.in/india/governance/street-vendors-face-constant-threat-of-eviction-valid-licences-law-to-protect-them-dont-help/1868601/>

rural areas.<sup>7</sup> It facilitated collateral-free working capital loans of up to Rs 10,000 for a tenure of one year. A second loan amount of Rs 20,000 and a third loan of up to Rs 50,000 were introduced with effect from 9 April, 2021 and 1 June, 2022 respectively.<sup>8</sup>

In December 2023, Union Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs Hardeep Singh Puri informed the Rajya Sabha that loans disbursed to PM SVANidhi beneficiaries amounted to Rs 2,039 crore in FY 2020–21, Rs 1,248 crore in FY 2021–22, Rs 1,866 crore in FY 2022–23, and Rs 4,637 crore in FY 2023–24, with 5th December being the last reported date for FY 2023–24. The total, as of 5 December 2023, was Rs 9,790 crore. He further stated that 56,58,744 street vendor beneficiaries have been disbursed loans under the scheme,<sup>9</sup> as of 5 December 2023. He also revealed that 45% of beneficiaries are women and 72% belong to marginalised sections.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman claimed in the interim budget 2024–25 that “78 lakhs street vendors have benefited from the scheme and out of this 2.3 lakh vendors have received a credit for the third time”. This flagship initiative has been declared one of the successful schemes that played a crucial role in supporting street vendors.

Now let’s revisit the Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs’ report of 2 February 2022, and reexamine the numbers the government has been reporting since December 2023 with respect to this ‘flagship initiative’. As reported above, the scheme was announced on 1 June 2020, and since then, it took two years for the Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs to identify 49.48 lakh street vendors as per their report released in February 2022. On 5 December 2023, the Ministry stated that the beneficiaries of the scheme totalled 56.58 lakh street vendors, and just two months later, in February 2024, the Finance Minister proudly announced in the interim budget that 78 lakh street vendors have benefited from the scheme. The question that needs asking here is where the numbers are being sourced from—30 lakh extra people who benefitted from the scheme in a span of two years from 2022 to 2024—when it took the Ministry two years, from the announcement of the scheme in 2020, to simply identify the total number of street vendors. When the math doesn’t add up, who is lying then? The Finance Minister, the Housing Minister or the data itself? With General Elections knocking on the country’s door, it is hardly surprising that these tall claims, backed by no solid, verifiable data or basis, are being made.

Despite these schemes, street vendors are still reeling from the economic impacts of the pandemic. The government’s initial mismanagement of the situation, their disregard for the plight of the community during the lockdowns and the economic repercussions of

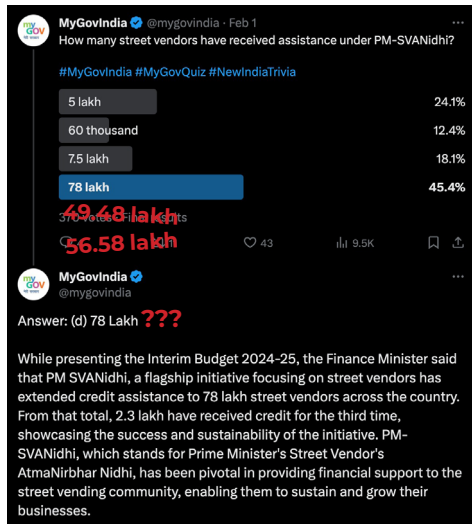
7 <https://www.india.gov.in/spotlight/pm-street-vendors-atmanirbhar-nidhi-pm-svanidhi>

8 <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/finance/loans-worth-rs-9790-crore-disbursed-to-street-vendors-under-pm-svanidhi-scheme-government-in-rajya-sabha/articleshow/105904085.cms?from=mdr>

9 <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/finance/loans-worth-rs-9790-crore-disbursed-to-street-vendors-under-pm-svanidhi-scheme-government-in-rajya-sabha/articleshow/105904085.cms?from=mdr>

10 <https://newsonair.gov.in/Main-News-Details.aspx?id=474242>

the lockdowns have left a deep scar in the livelihoods of street vendors. As is evidenced through the report, the pandemic has affected the entire street vending community adversely and most are still struggling to find their feet even after four years.



The PMSVANidhi was announced on 1 June 2020, and since then, it took two years for the Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs to identify 49.48 lakh street vendors as per their report released in February 2022. On 5 December 2023, the Ministry stated that the beneficiaries of the scheme totalled 56.58 lakh street vendors, and just two months later, in February 2024, the Finance Minister proudly announced in the interim budget that 78 lakh street vendors have benefited from the scheme. The question that needs asking here is where the numbers are being sourced from—30 lakh extra people who benefitted from the scheme in a span of two years from 2022 to 2024—when it took the Ministry two years, from the announcement of the scheme in 2020, to simply identify the total number of street vendors. When the math doesn't add up, who is lying then? The Finance Minister, the Housing Minister or the data itself? With General Elections knocking on the country's door, it is hardly surprising that these tall claims, backed by no solid, verifiable data or basis, are being made.

The imperative function of any government is to serve people, and this function assumes a greater role during a crisis. During the pandemic, an already tumultuous time, it was the government's duty to tackle the health crisis efficiently without causing panic among people. It should have also made sure that people, specifically those from the less privileged and vulnerable sections, were cared for, along with providing them with easy access to basic amenities and health care. However, what was witnessed was an increase in discrimination based on socio-economic and religious status; poor coordination by the government; an alarming increase in police harassment, especially on the underprivileged; a refusal to listen to people's concerns (or delayed responses); delayed relief schemes; and so on.

### ***The pandemic laid bare systemic injustices***

India has a long-standing history of justifying oppression, which is backed by lopsided moral underpinnings. Irrefutably, it is the Dalits, Adivasis, backward communities, Muslims, etc. who are at the receiving end of such oppression. Since most people working in the unorganised sector are from these communities, it makes them targets of constant abuse and hate. This oppression is almost deemed necessary, and it is painted even as acts of benevolence, for example in the development discourse. This phenomenon, while nothing new, escalated during the pandemic. Migrants and unorganised sector workers etc were mercilessly assaulted by the police and state authorities, who branded them as 'lockdown rule-breakers' and 'corona-spreaders'. Such actions illustrate how oppressors justify their oppression by couching it in terms that make it seem morally admissible.

To impose lockdowns, police were seen beating up people with batons and thrashing them on the streets. They also hurled abuses. Even when the lockdown was lifted and people were free to travel or move about and set up shops, there were several instances where the police didn't hesitate in using force, and continued to harass and beat them. Who enabled over-policing? Why was the government silent on police brutality? Why was no action taken to address this concern?

Vendors who were surveyed and had a certificate were evicted with no prior notice. Why? Why were they being forcefully removed from their residences and places of livelihood by the very authorities who were supposed to help them at a time of crisis? Who is answerable for these violations? How does one ensure that such events don't go unquestioned in a democracy and those responsible are held accountable?



20TH JULY 2023  
TIME: 11 AM TO 2 PM  
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CONTACT DETAILS: 9810648828

**SEEKING TRUTH ACCOUNTABILITY AND JUSTICE FOR STREET VENDORS**

Public hearing organized by  
**Peoples' Commission and Public Inquiry Committee**  
and  
**Hawkers Joint Action Committee**

**PC** स्ट्रीट वेंडरों के लिए सत्य, जवाबदेही और न्याय की तलाश **HJAC**

**WE DESERVE BETTER**

PEOPLE'S RIGHT TO INVESTIGATE/QUESTION

KEEPING ALIVE PEOPLE'S MEMORIES

स्वान - कॉन्स्टिट्यूशन क्लब, डिप्टी स्वीकर हॉल, नई दिल्ली

दिनांक: 9 अगस्त 2023

समय: सुबह 11 बजे से दोपहर 2 बजे तक.



# INTRODUCTION





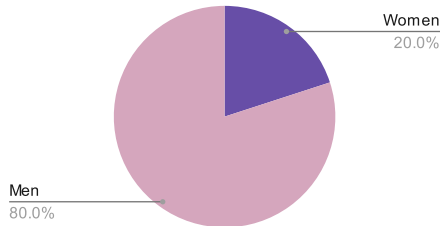
# BRIEF PROFILE OF THE PUBLIC HEARINGS

To look into questions and bring to light the issues faced by street vendors during the pandemic, subsequent lockdowns, and the continuing impacts it had on their lives, PC-PIC along with the Hawkers Joint Action Committee conducted three local public hearings in Delhi, in Kalkaji (20th July), Karol Bagh (28th July), and Jwala Nagar (4th August) where approximately 150 people were in attendance at every public hearing. A final, culmination hearing was held in the Constitution Club (9th August) in New Delhi to cohesively listen to the hawkers' concerns. The research team of PC-PIC spoke with a total of 106 street vendors in three different parts of Delhi, namely Kalkaji (33), Karol Bagh (33), and Jwala Nagar (40), and their testimonies were recorded. (see Annexure 1)

While over 150 street vendors were in attendance at all three public hearings, only 90 depositions could be made at the hearings for preliminary research, due to time constraints. Based on these depositions, their grievances were categorised into PC-PIC's framework of death, debt, and distress, and were used for data analysis. A brief profile of the 90 depositions in the form of graphs and key data points have been provided below. Details can be found later in the report.

The sex ratio based on the depositions made shows that men constituted 80% of street vendors and women, 20% (see Fig 1).

*Fig.1 Sex ratio*



A majority of vendors (42.0%) chose not to mention their caste at the hearings. 34.6% belonged to OBC, 13.6% belonged to SC and 1.2% belonged to ST while 8.6% were from the General Category. (see Fig 2).

Out of the 90 vendors, almost 90% are engaged in stationary vending. (see Fig 3)

A majority of the respondents have been street vendors for 16–20 years. It is also interesting to note that based on the caste composition of the 90 depositions, those from the Scheduled Caste have been in this occupation the longest, followed by those from the Other Backward Class (OBC). (See Fig 4).

Fig.2 Caste Composition

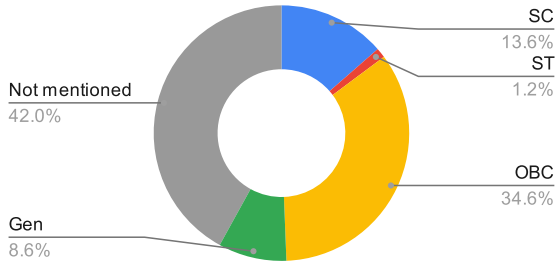


Fig.3 Kinds of vending associated with

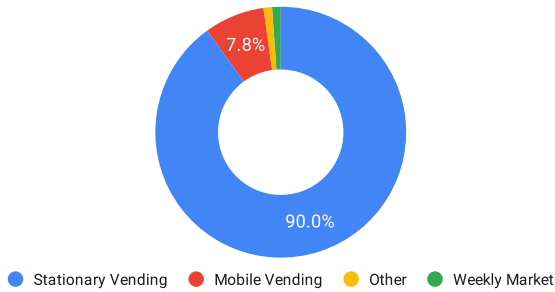
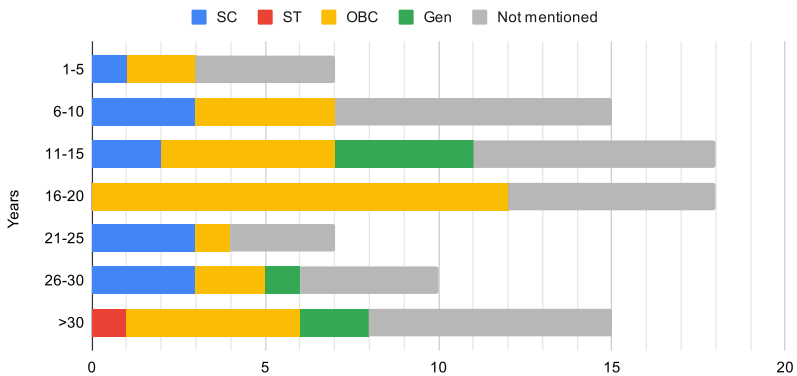


Fig.4 Number of years of vending



**83.34%** of the vendors faced at least 50% reduction in their income, and 81% reported that they have gone into debt as a result of the pandemic.

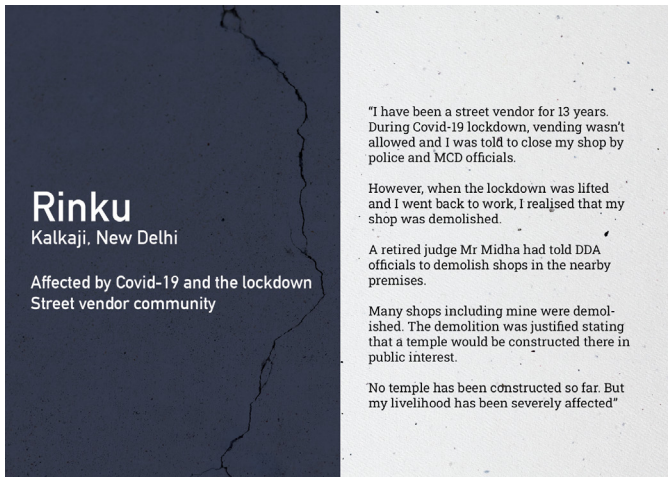
# WAS EVICTION THE NORM DURING COVID-19?

At a time when people were being directed to stay indoors and venture out only for basic necessities, widespread evictions were being carried out in different parts of India on the pretext of development projects. These evictions were inflicted on people at a time when they were already reeling from the loss of livelihood and struggling to survive. While there is no official data available on evictions in India, according to a report by the Housing and Land Rights Network (HLRN), between March 2020 and July 2021, more than 43,000 homes were demolished and about 21 people were evicted every hour, in the NCT. It has been estimated that over 2,50,000 evictions have taken place in India between 2020 and 2021. These evictions were often carried out without prior notice, and no compensation was offered by the government post eviction. While authorities maintained that only “illegal encroachments” were demolished, the report by HLRN revealed that in nearly all the cases, officials did not follow due process, including issuing notice to inform the evicted sufficiently ahead of time. Additionally, only a quarter of those evicted were resettled.<sup>11</sup>

It was also found that 49% of the evictions took place due to ‘environmental projects’ on the pretext of forest protection and wildlife conservation. It should be noted that the forceful eviction of traditional forest dwellers directly violates the Forest Rights Act, 2006—this is highlighted in the PC-PIC report based on public hearings conducted

11

[https://www.hlrn.org.in/documents/Forced\\_Evictions\\_2020.pdf](https://www.hlrn.org.in/documents/Forced_Evictions_2020.pdf)



with forest workers. Similarly, in 2020, 7,689 people were evicted in 73 drives for encroachment removal and beautification, and 8,658 people were evicted in 33 drives for infrastructure projects across India. It should be emphasised that this was happening while there was a nationwide public health crisis unfolding, and people needed stable housing to keep themselves safe. The majority of the people displaced were informal sector workers who had been living at the sites for decades. Undeniably, Dalits, Adivasis, and other marginalised communities faced the brunt of these evictions.

During the pandemic, even the Supreme Court issued an eviction order for around 48,000 households living near the railway tracks in Delhi. This is particularly devastating as people who had already lost their livelihoods were also rendered homeless by the justice system. This order caused the United Nations Special Rapporteur on adequate housing, Mr Balakrishnan Rajagopal, to raise his concerns. “This amounts to a full-fledged denial of justice for the low-income people living along the railway tracks,” said Rajagopal. He further warned that any eviction that leads to homelessness would be a serious violation of human rights and India’s obligations under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.<sup>12</sup> He also called on the government to ban all evictions until the end of the pandemic.

In 2020 and 2021, the Supreme Court issued orders for the eviction of Khori Gaon residents without any provision of rehabilitation, failing in its duty to protect the most vulnerable yet again. Most of the residents in Khori Gaon are migrants from Delhi and nearby states, who work in the informal sector. They were already struggling with the loss of livelihood caused by the pandemic and lockdowns, and had been pushed to the brink of poverty. The first demolition occurred during the peak of the first wave of COVID-19, on 14 September, 2020. Over 1,700 houses were demolished.<sup>13</sup> The residents’ request to the Faridabad authorities (Haryana state government) for a survey and rehabilitation as per state policy was ignored, and the second demolition took place on 2 April, 2021, where over 300 houses were demolished without prior notice. The United Nations responded to the evictions, calling on the Indian government to halt them and stating that rendering nearly 1,00,000 people homeless would put them at a greater risk of contracting the virus.<sup>14</sup>

The story of street vendors is not any different. Street vendors from different parts of the country were evicted during the pandemic. Often seen as illegal occupants of public space, they are frequently targeted, harassed and evicted by authorities. Regardless of whether or not they have been surveyed and identified as a ‘legal’ vendor, they are constant victims of harassment and corruption. To make matters worse for them, it has been found that the survey of street vendors is not being conducted effectively, despite repeated requests from vendors. This leaves a large number of vendors unidentified and they are often displaced or evicted through no fault of their own. The

12 <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2020/09/india-un-expert-raises-alarm-about-mass-evictions-delhi>

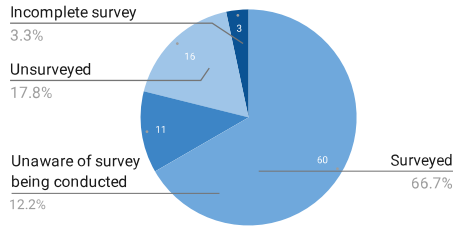
13 <https://thewire.in/rights/how-khori-gaon-residents-now-facing-eviction-received-no-help-during-the-pandemic>

14 <https://thewire.in/rights/un-rights-experts-calls-on-india-to-halt-eviction-of-khori-gaon-residents-in-haryana>

survey of the street vendors has been neglected despite the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014 stating that the civic body is bound by law to conduct a survey of street vendors every five years.

Vendors at the hearings disclosed that 60 of them (66.67%) have been surveyed. 11 vendors (12.22%) weren't aware of the surveys being conducted. 16 vendors (17.78%) weren't surveyed and weren't provided with any reason by the surveyor as to why. Three vendors (3.33%) revealed that surveyors left without completing the survey. (see Fig 5)

**Fig.5 Number of years of vending**



*“I have been a street vendor near the Lotus Temple for 27 years. In September 2021, all street vendors, regardless of possessing relevant documents for vending, near the Lotus Temple were **evicted by the government in the name of redevelopment of the temple.** However, no such redevelopment has happened so far.”*

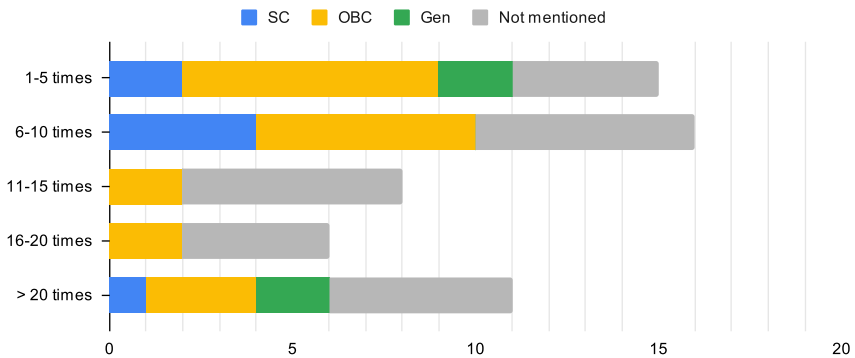
– Mr Praveen Kumar, a street vendor from Kalkaji, Delhi.

The eviction of street vendors intensified as forceful evictions took place in different parts of the country due to the G20 Summit. In Delhi, while authorities focused on beautifying the capital in preparation for the global summit, it decided to turn a blind eye to the misery faced by street vendors and intentionally caused them more distress by carrying out eviction drives across the city. Stalls set up by vendors were promptly removed by authorities, and they were offered no recourse or compensation for their losses. While officials claim that only ‘illegal’ vendors were removed, it was soon revealed that vendors who possessed the Certificate of Vending (CoV) were also removed by officials. Multiple reports state that when vendors with relevant documents questioned the illegal eviction, they were ignored. Furthermore, in Delhi, after eviction, vendors along the Yamuna were told to ‘stay hidden till G20’.<sup>15</sup>Vendors allege that if they did set up shops, officials immediately removed them.

Vendors revealed that they were not allowed to run their business two months before the G20 summit despite them owning a Certificate of Vending. In July 2023, when a group of vendors approached the Delhi High Court challenging the eviction order by MCD, they were granted permission by the court to carry on vending till 6 September. However, despite the court’s direction, vendors were denied their livelihood as officials didn’t allow them to start vending till almost a week after the G20 summit.<sup>16</sup> Even when vendors own valid licenses issued by the civic body, they find themselves approaching the court for relief as their livelihood regularly comes to a halt due to eviction by MCD officials.

From the 90 depositions made at the hearings, it was revealed that 56 vendors (62%) had been evicted at least once since the pandemic. (see Fig 6)

**Fig.6 Number of times evicted from 2020-2023**



The G20-related evictions were another blow in an already precarious situation for vendors who had not yet recovered from the pandemic, and were struggling with reduced incomes and unstable livelihoods. The insensitive actions of the authorities who seem to be constantly on the lookout to destabilise their lives, is perhaps the greatest obstacle of all.

With no relief from harassment, constant threat of eviction, delayed surveying, and the authorities’ refusal to definitively implement the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014, despite repeated requests, vendors find themselves wondering about the future of their livelihoods, and if things would ever take a turn for the better.

# SPIRALLING DEBT AND DELIBERATE STATE NEGLIGENCE

Street vendors were one of the hardest hit communities during the pandemic and the ensuing lockdowns. Not only did they lose their livelihoods, they also faced targeted violence under the strict lockdown restrictions. Most street vendors are Dalits, Adivasis or belong to other marginalised communities. Having been constant victims of systemic oppression by the state, they had no form of security in place to handle the repercussions of the pandemic. In the absence of any alternative, street vendors' work came to a halt overnight. So did their earnings. This struggle continued throughout the successive lockdowns. Additionally, the lockdown led to the exponential growth of online delivery platforms. This further impacted the livelihood of vendors as many started relying on online sources to get essentials delivered to their doorsteps. Struggling to make ends meet and pushed to starvation, street vendors had no option but to dip into their meagre savings or rely heavily on moneylenders. The latter has caused increased debts with high interest rates<sup>17</sup> among vendors, and now with the massive reduction in their income, they struggle to repay these debts, making them easy targets of harassment by moneylenders.

Public hearings revealed that 86 vendors (95.6%) reported that the pandemic drastically impacted their earnings while 83.34% (75 out of 90 vendors) faced 50% reduction in their income because of the pandemic. Vendors who belong to the SC category faced a massive 75% reduction. (see Fig 7)

**Sunitha**  
Kalkaji, New Delhi

Affected by Covid-19 and the lockdown  
Street vendor community

"I have been a street vendor for 2 years.

During Covid-19, when the lockdown was lifted and we were allowed to work, police and MCD officials kept harassing me.

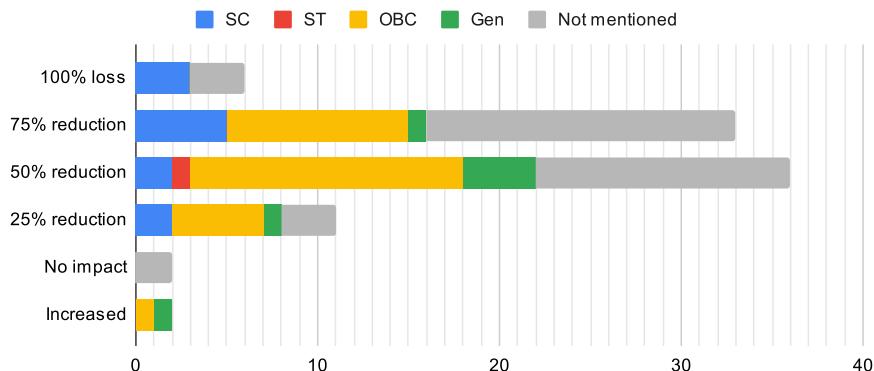
They forcefully closed my shop 6-7 times and my 2 carts, amounting to INR 24,000 was seized. I never got my carts back.

Officials harass when we refuse to pay a bribe. I have all the legal documents required for vending, but there is no end to harassmen.

I have 3 children, all in school. I am the sole breadwinner of the house.

I had to take a loan of INR 1,50,000 to survive during the pandemic. I also took a PMSVANidhi loan."

Fig.7 Impact on Income

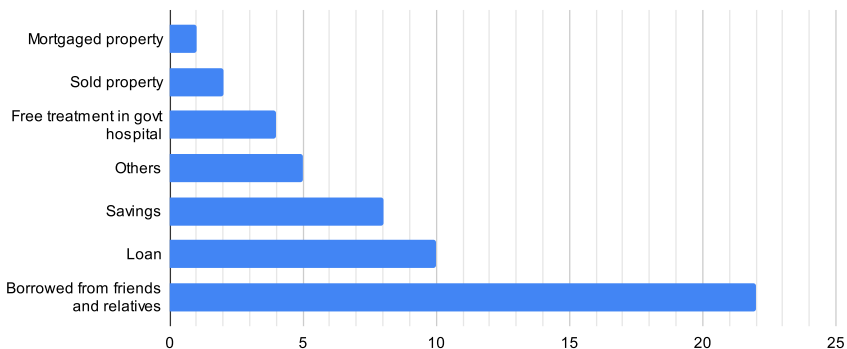


*“I had no money and had to take a loan of Rs 4,00,000 to sustain myself during the lockdown. Due to decreased income, I haven’t been able to repay this amount,”* said Ram Charan, a vendor from Jwala Nagar, Delhi.

A large section of vendors also ended up borrowing from moneylenders, even for hospital visits and treatments. “During the lockdown, my son took a loan of Rs 1,50,000 from moneylenders. Due to the loss of income, he was unable to repay the amount. He faced constant harassment from the moneylenders due to which he fell ill. For his treatment, I had to take another loan of Rs 1,00,000, which also remains unpaid,” said 65-year-old Shanti Devi, a street vendor from Kalkaji. Despite her efforts, her son passed away in February 2023 and she continues to be neck-deep in debt, and unable to find ways to repay the same.

Based on the depositions, 57.8% required medical treatment. 61.5% either relied on moneylenders or borrowed money from their friends and family. (see Fig 8)

Fig.8 Means of financial healthcare cost during the pandemic





While the launch of PMSVANidhi scheme by the government in June 2020 was a welcome relief for vendors, they also state that, given the scale of their economic distress, the initial working capital of Rs 10,000 wasn't of much help. If they are unable to successfully resume their business, they would also struggle to repay the loan. A media report by the Thomson Reuters Foundation revealed that out of the 15 street vendors they interviewed in New Delhi, only three had applied for the loan. Others expressed their indifference to applying due to red tape or lack of interest in the amount that was offered.<sup>18</sup> Vendors expressed their frustration with the amount that was being offered as they asserted that it betrays the government's lack of understanding about how much they spend on raw materials, transport, etc. Furthermore, they felt that navigating the loan application process took too much effort for the paltry Rs 10,000 that was being offered.

The vendors asserted that the government could have offered them a cash grant instead of a loan. Additionally, a section of vendors also faced difficulty accessing the loan as they were being sent from one place to another to apply. While a section of vendors did receive the loan, others struggled to get their loans approved. Another section of vendors is still waiting for the disbursement of their loans.

***"I applied for the PMSVANidhi loan of Rs 10,000, but have not received the amount," a vendor from Jwala Nagar said.***

**Heena**  
Jwala Nagar, New Delhi

Affected by Covid-19 and the lockdown  
Street vendor community

"When I restarted vending once the lockdown was lifted, MCD officials and police used to come around and verbally harass me.

"Recently, a few people from the MCD Committee confiscated my fish which cost around INR 50,000, and thrashed me.

I have all the documents required for vending still I am being harassed. I have not received any support from the government.

Pandemic has affected my income significantly and financial distress keeps increasing.

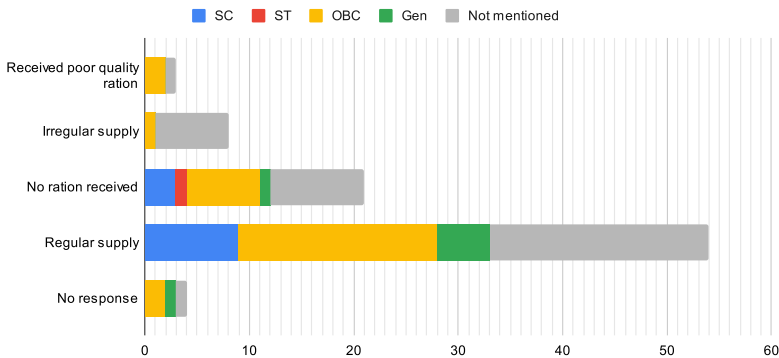
I am under a debt of INR 10,00,000 and haven't been able to repay it"

# PLANNED ATROCITIES BY THE STATE

The pandemic exposed the gravity of existing socio-economic disparities and the inequalities prevalent in the country. While the privileged and rich lived in the comfort of their homes, with the occasional inconvenience of not being able to step out, the poor and vulnerable struggled with food insecurity, keeping a roof over their heads and a fear of eviction. While the former had easy access to healthcare without having to bother too much about the expenses, the latter struggled with the loss of livelihood and depleting savings. Furthermore, the pandemic reinforced and enhanced the stigmatisation, discrimination, and violence that are already faced by the oppressed. While it is true that the “virus doesn’t discriminate,” the government certainly did.

Even the government schemes meant to benefit the marginalised didn’t do them any good during the pandemic. According to the depositions made at the hearings, despite the dedicated PMGKAY Government scheme, 21 vendors (23.4%) did not receive rations, whereas around 36 vendors (40%) said that rations weren’t regularly supplied. (see Fig 9)

*Fig.9 Status of ration received under PMGKAY*



The pandemic was a time that should have seen the emergence of a welfare state that cares for its citizens, especially those in social and/or financial need. Instead, what was witnessed was the reinforcement of a police state, where the government exercised authoritarian control over its people through the police.

The deployment of a police force to crack down on the mobility of marginalised sections of society, jeopardising their livelihoods and very survival, is a direct violation of human rights and evidence of a police state. The conflict between the police and citizens was



People wait in a queue to collect free ration from a government store  
Photo: PTI

a common sight during the pandemic, the former often resorting to using batons and brutally assaulting people who were forced to breach lockdown rules. A report by the National Institute of Health (United States) revealed that while 56% of the population saw the police helping civilians during the lockdown, 55% reported being afraid of the police and another 55% reported being concerned about being beaten up by the police. The report further revealed that people from underprivileged sections of the society were more scared of the police during lockdowns, especially fearing police violence.<sup>19</sup>

Street vendors too faced their share of violence from the police and MCD officials. The harassment they face from officials is not a new occurrence. Even before the pandemic, they were targets of relentless harassment by the police and MCD officials. This however worsened during the pandemic. The public hearings unearthed that police and MCD officials forced vendors to shut their shops/businesses during the pandemic. Even as the lockdown lifted, allowing people to resume their business, vendors found themselves struggling to resume vending as officials would often come up with batons, demanding they close shop. Their goods were sometimes thrown away or seized along with their carts. Vendors incurred further losses due to these actions.

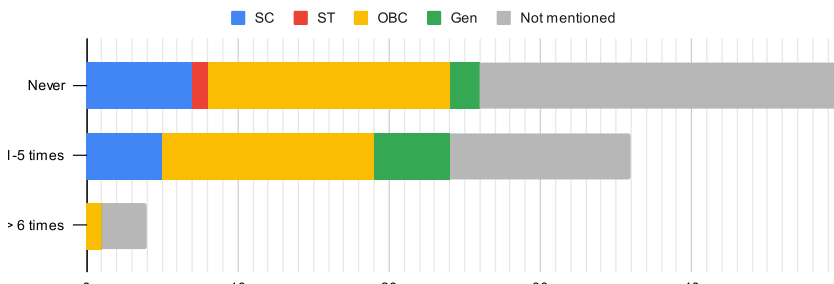
“On 29 March, 2023, while I was vending, **the police caught and thrashed me**. I told them that I was fasting and to show some mercy to which the officials responded by mocking and telling me that I should seek mercy from God to secure my livelihood. Due to the thrashing, **I fractured my leg**,” said Imran, a vendor from Jwala Nagar.

**“After the lockdown was lifted, police and MCD officials forcefully closed my shop six-seven times and seized my two carts (redi) worth around Rs 24,000. I never got back my carts,”** said Sunita, a vendor from Kalkaji.

The public hearings also exposed the incessant harassment by officials. 40 (44.44%) out of 90 vendors reported that their goods were either seized or thrown away. (see Fig 10)

Vendors often ended up in hospitals as a result of physical harassment by officials. The additional expense of medical treatment only added to their distress. In addition to this,

**Fig.10 Number of times goods were seized or thrown away from 2020–2023**



officials demand bribes from vendors who want to set up shops. They are not allowed to run their businesses if they refuse to pay the bribe. This causes more tension between vendors and officials. Often times, vendors find it difficult to pay a bribe as they are already struggling with reduced earnings. In other cases, vendors refuse to pay the bribe as they own legal licenses. But these documents don't matter to officials. Refusal to pay the bribe also results in threats, goods being destroyed, and/or challans being issued without a cause.

**“If I have to run my shop, I have to make sure some money goes to the officials. These officials, in exchange of money, also help new people to set up their shops and you can see new shops coming up every day. This has impacted the daily earnings of the vendors here,”** said Ajay Kumar, a street vendor in Kalkaji.

Vendors assert that as the police and MCD officials are at the discretion of the state, they act as they please and when confronted, they resort to destroying the vendors' shops or goods. The vendors' pleas go unheard and the officials/authorities are not held accountable. The vendors demand that the government look into these matters and take strict action.

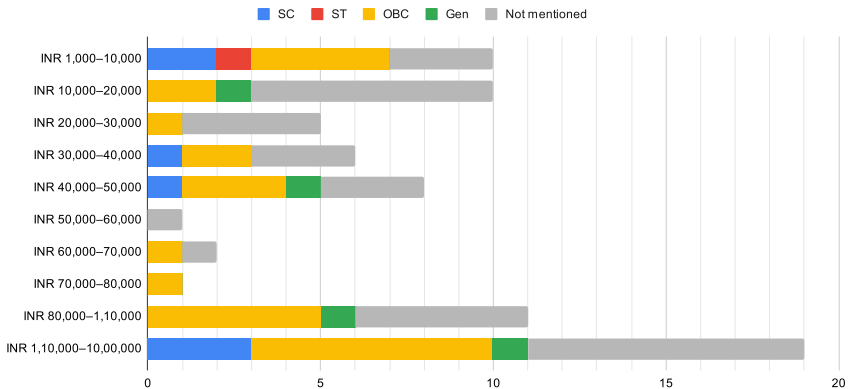
# DISTRESS: A NEVER-ENDING TALE

Even before the pandemic, vendors' incomes were low. The pandemic and subsequent lockdowns only worsened their economic situation. The lack of work during the pandemic had them falling back on whatever savings they had. Eventually, that too dwindled and soon they were left with neither income nor savings. The community then had to turn to moneylenders to survive—be it for hospital treatments, or to buy smartphones for their children's online education—taking large amounts as loans at high interest rates.

*“During the pandemic, my shop was closed for 20 months. I have a family of seven to feed. I had no income and took a loan of Rs 2,00,000 to survive,”* said Shanti Devi, a street vendor in Kalkaji.

73 (81%) out of 90 vendors revealed that they have been in debt since the pandemic. Half of the vendors are in a debt of more than Rs 50,000 and 22% are in a debt of INR 1 lakh and more (see Fig 11).

**Fig.11 Debt incurred**



Four years into the pandemic, vendors are yet to fully recover from its impacts. Their livelihood hasn't stabilised and they are dealing with a massive reduction in income. Having relied heavily on moneylenders during the pandemic, they now struggle to repay the loans while also sustaining themselves. It is no surprise then that most of them continue to struggle to make ends meet and have barely made it back from the brink of starvation.

*"I used to earn INR 1,000 daily selling vegetables before the pandemic. **Now I hardly manage to earn INR 200,"** said Dhanwanti, a vendor in Jwala Nagar.*

Apart from the financial distress the pandemic has caused them, they also struggle with constant harassment by police and MCD officials. Not a day goes by when they don't face harassment by these officials, be it the seizing of goods or physical violence. Due to the threat of eviction, vendors find themselves moving their business from one place to another which is also a cause for distress. Even when courts rule in their favour, officials refuse to let them run their businesses. When officials carry out eviction drives, vendors are not provided with compensation in most cases. Neither are they provided with an alternative location where they can run their business in peace, free from harassment.

Some officials demand a bribe for allowing vendors to set up their shops despite the latter owning legal licenses. At other times, the shops of those who don't own licenses are destroyed. When they do decide to register a complaint, they are threatened and further harassed for daring to do so.

Town Vending Committee (TVC) members and street vendors reveal that the survey of vendors is not being carried out effectively. This has resulted in a section of vendors not being surveyed and not receiving the necessary documentation required for vending. This further increases their chances of being harassed by officials when they discreetly try to sell their goods out of pure desperation. It must be emphasised here that even members of the TVC, an elected body who has certain powers and privilege compared to other undocumented vendors, have been unable to instrumentalise the effective implementation of either the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014, or the protection of vendors during a public health crisis.

The MCD has surveyed vendors, hawkers, etc. only once in 2021. While it is estimated that Delhi is home to 4,00,000–5,00,000 vendors, only 76,301 street vendors were identified during the survey in 2021.<sup>20</sup> According to the latest media report, Delhi is

20 <https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/delhi-news/mcd-to-conduct-fresh-census-of-street-hawkers-and-vendors-in-delhi-project-expected-to-take-six-months-101692641479236.html>

set to begin the survey of vendors soon,<sup>21</sup> but authorities are yet to provide a tentative date for the same. However, until the survey is completed, a majority of vendors remain at risk of harassment by officials for being 'illegal' vendors. Ironically, vendors' testimonies reveal that being a 'legal' vendor provides no guarantee against or safeguard from harassment by officials. They can only hope that the strict implementation of the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014, will provide them with some relief.

**Kumar**  
Jwala Nagar, New Delhi

Affected by Covid-19 and the lockdown  
Street vendor community

"I have been a vendor for 48 years.

My shop was closed during the first wave of Covid-19. But during this times, challans were issued randomly without stating any reason by police and MCD officials.

When a few of us questioned this, we were beaten up and then arrested by the police.

I was in jail for 2 days and in these 2 days, I lost my vending materials worth INR 2,50,000.

"I lost everything and had to borrow money to survive.

Since Covid-19, income has come down drastically. It's not enough to survive"

21 <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/delhi/vendor-survey-to-begin-soon-in-new-delhi/article-show/107158813.cms>

## WHAT NOW?

- **95.6% of street vendors reported an adverse impact on their income**
- **73% are currently in debt due to the livelihood loss**
- **22% facing a debt of more than INR 1 lakh**

Caste and class prejudice that exists in India has contributed to the devaluation and dehumanisation of the working class. Street vendors are no exception. Despite the community's generous contribution to the urban/rural economy and GDP, they struggle to live a dignified life, a fundamental right that is guaranteed to the citizens by the Constitution of India, Article 21. Their livelihood is regularly threatened and they fail to live by the rights that are guaranteed to them by law.

Whatever progress was made by and for the street vending community has retrogressed since the pandemic. Who is accountable for the countless injustices faced by the community? Have governments become blind and deaf to their struggles and demands? Are they targeted because of the social category they belong to? The purpose of the public hearings is to expose ground realities and the extent of issues faced by the community.

While this is a Delhi-specific report and 90 depositions may seem like an insignificant number for data analysis, we remind the readers here that our investigation had 150 people in attendance and coming forward to share their stories of distress. **95.6% of street vendors reported an adverse impact on their income** due to the pandemic and **73% are currently in debt due to the livelihood loss** they faced with **22% facing a debt of more than INR 1 lakh**. The government has not yet held a public hearing to investigate the setbacks faced by street vendors during the pandemic. While civil society can conduct sample surveys to assess ground realities, it is the duty of the government to be proactive and examine the bottom-up impacts of a crisis so that adequate response measures can be taken in the future. While governments such as in the United Kingdom have taken active steps towards learning from the pandemic by setting up a COVID-19 inquiry and conducting public hearings, no such steps have been taken in India where both the impact and the aftermath of the pandemic have been quite damaging.



The public hearings, conducted by the Public Inquiry Committee and Peoples' Commission (PC-PIC) and Hawkers Joint Action Committee, to unearth the continuing impacts of the pandemic on the community have revealed that years into the pandemic, their lives are nowhere near steady. While governments have moved on and directed people to move past the events of the pandemic, it is crucial that the memories of the pandemic are kept alive.

The planned atrocities in the form of forceful evictions or denial of livelihood, etc. which intensified during the pandemic, were driven by a nexus of the state, centre, and local authorities. This makes one wonder if the governments and authorities even acknowledge their rights as a community.

It is important to recognise the street vending community's right to livelihood, right to dignified life and access to basic rights—these are not handouts but the right of every citizen as guaranteed by the Constitution of India. Despite how hard the government and authorities shrug off their responsibilities and justify the atrocities meted out to the community, no one can defend the monstrous acts and human rights violations.

Along with the loss of financial stability, the street vendors also struggled due to high inflation. India's inflation rate in 2024 is 4.55%;<sup>22</sup> it is expected that the inflation will dip to around 4% by mid-2024 and rise marginally thereafter.<sup>23</sup> However, the actual inflationary impact is much higher with every section of the society feeling the pressure. While the country is grappling with high inflation, food inflation remains significantly high, making food inaccessible for most people. It is worth noting that the interim Budget 2024–25 presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman made no mention of either inflation or unemployment—two growing concerns, especially for the lower-middle and middle-class, since the pandemic. Despite these concerns being raised on multiple occasions, the government's refusal to address them is glaringly obvious.

Although the government has chosen the path of silence, denial and deliberate absence, these events mustn't go undisputed and unaddressed. It is critical to hold those responsible, accountable. Investigating these atrocities unleashed on marginalised communities is of grave importance. In the process of questioning and seeking accountability from the governments, PC-PIC aims to create a democratic response “by the people, of the people, and for the people”. It seeks to deepen the accountability of institutions and governance, and create a bottom-up approach. Furthermore, the initiative intends to empower the people who have been rendered helpless by deliberate state action.

# RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE PEOPLES COMMISSIONERS

**Avinash Kumar**, human rights activist and writer, noted that stories of the difficulties faced by street vendors aren't meant to be shared occasionally for a few hours or one day. He asserted that new ways to consistently carry out the PC-PIC process for effective government intervention need to be thought of. It was said that people were all in the same boat during the COVID-19 crisis. However, three years into the pandemic, it is clear that that statement is untrue. The affluent have progressed; people have become millionaires and billionaires since the pandemic, while the poor have continued to suffer. The economic disparities caused by the pandemic in the country are significant. Despite sharing the woes of vendors with the government, it is becoming increasingly evident that they're not heard. Information dissemination, organisation, and agitation should continue. The government needs to definitively understand that claiming that the 'crisis has been solved' will not work. Moreover, the Delhi government's process is too complex with constant overlapping of various roles and responsibilities. This is confusing for people. There should be a process where the entire chain of governance is explained, and how those with decision-making powers can be held accountable. The information should be collected and explained using platforms such as social media. Finally, a report, compiling all the stories narrated at these hearings should be prepared and published. All of this is not going to be easy. But this fight is yours and time has to be made for this fight. This has to be done consistently, without fail. Our victory will be built on this foundation.

**Rajendra Ravi**, who has been conducting research on the intersection of urban politics and sustainability for more than three decades, stated that the refusal to invite Town Vending Committee (TVC) members and not letting them speak when they do get invited can be solved only through persistent efforts and continuous advocacy with the government. The dictatorial approach of not letting vendors run their business for more than half an hour, despite owning the Certificate of Vending must be challenged. Street vendors are not confined to a single space. They need to be mobile and don't always have a permanent setup. It is also

imperative that surveyors are educated about the Street Vendors Act. While the Act acknowledges mobile and stationary vendors, during surveys, surveyors often overlook the fact that a 'mobile' vendor may have moved. This leaves them out of the survey, resulting in them not receiving the Certificate of Vending. Different effective mechanisms need to be thought of by authorities while conducting surveys to ensure that no vendor is left out.

While designing roads, authorities need to consider ways in which they can accommodate spaces for vendors so that their livelihoods aren't affected. It is against the constitutional rights provided under Article 21 to not let citizens carry on with their livelihoods. The TVC members must use their administrative rights and tactically engage and intervene when the government introduces developmental projects, disrupting their livelihood. The impact of the G20 Summit on the community must also be reflected upon.

**Indu Prakash**, noted activist and human rights defender, said that the issues raised are all poignant. He specifically addressed the TVC members, asking them to utilise the powers accorded to them under the Street Vendors Act, 2014, and to understand how to use them effectively. Whether it is expressing views or ensuring that the minutes are circulated properly, TVC members should use their strength and find new ways to deal with problems. The importance of other organisations and their ability to help and participate in the survey to fill the gaps shouldn't be undermined. Additionally, there is an apparent bias in the judiciary that needs to be addressed. Street vendors are seen as 'encroachers' and 'illegal' occupants, even when the Street Vendors Act, 2014 doesn't use these terms. Breaking away from the stereotype that vendors are 'encroachers' is crucial, and it is important to educate others about the same. Finally, it boils down to the fact that we all are with you in this struggle. We are not weak; we need to come together and walk together, and those in the government need to hear our concerns.

**Kumar Sambhav**, journalist and the founder of Land Conflict Watch, noted that when discussing issues mentioned about rights, use of commons, and right to secure livelihood from the land, it is essential to recognise that commons and community spaces belong to people, not any particular government. The government's responsibility is to govern. The attitude that those using commons are 'illegal' encroachers creates an unjust bias. Analysis of over 1,600 judgments from the

Supreme Court and High Courts shows that when the courts order removal/eviction to protect commons, the most commonly affected sections of people are Dalits, Adivasis and landless workers. On the contrary, when the encroacher is an industry or private player, they are not removed. Instead, the ruling is issued in their favour. The Street Vendors Act, 2014 has become toothless. The proper implementation of this Act is essential and regular surveys should be carried out to identify vendors. In the absence of surveys, certificates aren't issued. When certificates are issued, it doesn't specify the location. Due procedure should be followed while conducting surveys and issuing certificates, as mentioned in the Act. Accountability lies with those in power and they should act responsibly to prevent any wrongdoing that negatively impacts the livelihoods of vendors. The role of TVC members and their empowerment is crucial for the Act to be successfully implemented.

**Amrita Johri**, actively involved with the Right to Food and Right to Information campaigns, said that it is a political battle to establish the identity of vendors, further musing that their experiences of struggle should be used to turn this into a political revolution. She suggested having placards on vending carts to highlight vendors' struggles. When authorities remove vendors' stalls, vendors should come together and speak against it. Since there are 5,00,000 street vendors in Delhi, if all come together and talk about the harassment and other issues they face and demand action, the collective voice will be heard and the government will listen. Regarding the poorly conducted TVC meetings, live-streaming of these meetings should be initiated in addition to educating oneself on how to use media platforms. Vendors should document everything that is happening with them and reach out to as many people as possible.

**Rajesh Uppadhyay**, labour activist, reiterated that the contribution of street vendors to the Indian economy is invaluable. It is only fair and just that this community receives a fair representation for their contribution. Unfortunately, the current economic system only caters to the interests of the rich. The poor are left unattended. Political parties are unaware of the relevance of the street vendor community. Despite their significant contribution to the GDP and them being a vote bank, vendors are often neglected. To sensitise parties about vendors, it is important to strengthen organisational capacities and intensify grassroots movements. During the pandemic, we witnessed the breakdown of various systems, including the health system. Thousands lost their lives and their bodies were disposed of on the banks of the Ganga. We must

always remember these failures and atrocities. The government also failed the community by enacting new laws in the name of labour code. Massive evictions were carried out with no regard for their livelihood. All these highlight the inadequacy of laws about street vendors and the functioning of TVCs. The implementation of schemes like SVANidhi also proved to be inadequate.

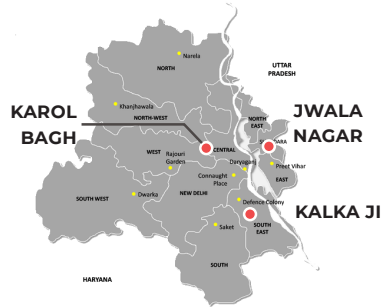
While people's struggles are important, it is also important to recognise the importance of the judiciary and legal battles in these testing times. Strengthening the unions and legal battles should go hand in hand.

**Abhinandita Dayal Mathur**, a member of DCPCR, said that despite her being involved in politics and having worked with the Delhi government, she understands and empathises with the concerns that were raised. Regarding the delay in implementation of the Street Vendors Act, 2014, there is an assurance from MCD that the survey process has begun, and the Act will be implemented within the next two months. TVC meetings too, will convene soon. At the local level, a channel through Resident Welfare Associations (RWA) should be created so that the vendors can discuss their issues in one designated place.

**Indira Unninayar**, lawyer and activist, maintained that street vendors have had a historical tag of being 'encroachers.' This title prevents them from acknowledging themselves as a 'legal' person who is allowed to conduct business. While the Street Vendors Act, 2014 is quite effective and doesn't use the term 'encroacher' to describe them, it hasn't stopped authorities, laymen, and even the judiciary from using this term for the community. They are called names and face discrimination based on their class, caste and social status just for trying to live by the rights that have been guaranteed by the Constitution and reinforced by the Act.

# ANNEXURE

## TESTIMONIES OF STREET VENDORS ARE LOCALITY BASED.



### KALKAJI, NEW DELHI

#### 1.Name: Mr Praveen Kumar (sells soft drinks and drinking water) Family: Seven members

Praveen Kumar has been a street vendor for 27 years, plying near the Lotus Temple. He is the only earning member in his family of seven. A year and a half ago, all street vendors were evicted by the government in the name of the redevelopment of the Lotus Temple. However, no such redevelopment has happened so far. The eviction started after a judge was appointed as administrator for the redevelopment of the Kalkaji Mandir. This happened during the pandemic, in September 2021. At the time, only 51 street vendors could provide proof of their work, and they were granted permission to work inside the temple premises. However, a huge number of street vendors were left out as they could neither travel to submit the proof because of travel restrictions nor provide proof of their work.

The Lotus Temple, a tourist location owned by a foreign social organisation, was opened to visitors after the lockdown was lifted. However, shopkeepers/vendors were not allowed to work there. For almost two years, shopkeepers and vendors demanded that the place be opened for them to do business.

#### Distress; financial loss, health

During the lockdown, his younger daughter, who suffers from cancer, had to visit the hospital for routine dialysis. However, they were denied permission by police officials as the UP border was sealed and travel was restricted. He later had to approach higher authorities to get permission to travel for his daughter's dialysis.

During the pandemic, he borrowed Rs 1,36,000 as there was no work and his income was affected. He had applied for a PM SVANidhi loan of Rs 10,000 but has not yet received the amount.

**2.Name: Mr Rinku Pal (sells toys)****Age: 28 years****Family: Three members**

Rinku is a migrant from Farrukhabad (UP) and has been a street vendor for nearly 13 years. He used to live in a rented house near Pappu Dharamshala, Kalkaji, where he also had a shop.

**Distress: financial loss, harassment by police & MCD officials**

During the lockdown, police and MCD officials forced him to close his shop. With his shop closed and his source of income gone, his parents had to send him money. He soon travelled with his wife and newborn baby to his native on foot, and they were supported by NGOs and the government whenever they needed food or water on the way. He returned after the first wave and found out that a retired judge, Mr Midha, who resides in Delhi Development Authority (DDA) flat, had directed DDA officials to demolish the shops in the nearby area. The former judge justified the demolition by stating the need to construct a temple in public interest. No temple has been built so far in the area, but the livelihood of those like Rinku has been drastically affected.

After his shop was forcibly closed, he started a redi shop, and this is now his source of income. However, his income has decreased significantly. He used to earn Rs 700–800 daily but it has now come down to Rs 400 per day. To make ends meet, he also took loans from his friends.

**3.Name: Mr Ajay Kumar (sells lime soda)****Age: 47 years****Family: Five members**

Ajay Kumar has been a street vendor for 30 years and had set up his lime soda shop near the Lotus Temple after the pandemic hit. He runs the shop along with his three brothers and a sister-in-law.

He owns a house in Dayalbagh. Before the pandemic, he ran an ice cream outlet and multiple shops, including a bakery. His earning was between Rs 3–4 lakhs per month.

**Distress: livelihood, police & MCD officials' harassment, and finance**

Things changed for the worse when the pandemic hit. He was forced to sell all his properties except his house. "Street vendors are considered worthless and are not respected in this society. Police and MCD officials constantly harass us. Documents don't matter to them. If I have to run my shop, I have to make sure some money goes

to them. It's not just me, this is the case with everyone. If you have to run your shop, you have to pay these officials. This is one of the many issues we face here. These officials, in exchange for money, also help new people set up their shops and you can see new shops coming up every day. This has impacted the daily earnings of street vendors here. When the state says we are respectable citizens of this country, they should treat us with respect and give us our rights," he said.

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**4.Name: Mr Feroj (sells toys)**

**Age: 41 years**

**Family: Three members**

Feroj has been a street vendor for 28 years. He has a daughter and a son. His son is in the 9th grade, and his daughter is in college.

**Distress: finance**

Before the pandemic, he used to earn Rs 25,000 to 30,000 per month. Since the pandemic, however, his earning has reduced by 75% and he now earns only Rs 5,000–7,000 per month.

His kids, who studied in private institutes before the pandemic, had to be shifted to government institutes as he faced severe financial distress. To sustain himself and his family, he took loans from multiple sources, except banks. He found life during lockdown difficult as he could not step out to work and earn any money to sustain his family. He is surveyed and possesses the necessary documents and proof required for vending.

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**5.Name: Ms Sunita (sells soft drinks, tea, etc.)**

**Age: 50 years**

**Family: Four members**

Sunita has been a street vendor for two years.

**Distress: police & MCD officials' harassment, finance and children's education**

After the pandemic-induced lockdown was lifted, MCD officials seized her two carts (redi), the loss of which amounted to Rs 24,000. She never got them back. Police and MCD officials forcefully closed her shop 6–7 times. "This happens when these officials don't get a bribe," she said. Due to harassment by officials, and the general difficulty



caused by the pandemic, her income has significantly reduced, and she is finding it difficult to survive. She has two daughters and one son. She couldn't afford to buy a smartphone for her children's education. Her son later dropped out of school.

### **Debt:**

Due to lack of work and income during the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns, she took a loan of INR 1,50,000. She hasn't been able to repay the whole amount. Rs 50,000 remains unpaid. She has also taken the PM SVANidhi loan. She is a surveyed vendor and possesses all the necessary documents and proof required for vending.

## **6.Name: Ms Shanti Devi (sells fruits)**

**Age: 65 years**

**Family: Three members**

Shanti Devi is a migrant from Jaipur, Rajasthan and has been a street vendor for 30 years. She is a widow since her husband passed away 15 years ago.

### **Distress and death: livelihood loss, homeless, landless and financial loss**

Her son helped her run the shop when she was sick. During the pandemic, due to loss of livelihood and income, he took a loan of INR 1,50,000. He was unable to repay this amount due to a lack of income. When pressure from the moneylender became much to handle, Ms Devi mortgaged her house for INR 1,00,000. However, the amount still could not be repaid. Stressed, her son fell ill and was admitted to Safdarjung Hospital, where he passed away on 2 February, 2023. Her son left behind his two kids, a son who is 14 years old and a daughter who is 10 years old. At the age of 65, she has to take care of herself and these kids. With a drastically reduced income, she can't even manage to save Rs 200 per day.

She applied for a ration card two years ago but has not yet received it. She can't return to her native place as she has no home or land there.

### **Debt:**

For the treatment of her son, Shanti Devi took a loan of Rs 1,00,000. The total loan has reached to around Rs 2 lakh and she has no means to pay it off.

She is surveyed and possesses all the necessary documents and proof required for vending.

## **7. Name: Ms Sona Devi (sells women's clothes and perfume)**

**Age: 45 years**

**Family: Seven members**

Sonal Devi is a migrant from Gorakhpur and has been a street vendor near the Lotus Temple for six years.

**Distress: livelihood and financial loss**

During the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns, her shop was closed for 20 months, leaving her with absolutely no income. From the time of the pandemic till now, her cart (redi) was seized by MCD officials four to five times. She retrieved her cart once by paying a penalty of Rs 20,000, after which she decided not to as the penalty was too high and she couldn't afford it. During the pandemic, when there was no income, she took a loan of Rs 2,00,000. She has been surveyed as a vendor and has all the documents required for vending.

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## **8. Name: Mr Kamal Kumar Sahni (sells soft drinks)**

**Age: 48 years**

**Family: Three members**

Kamal Kumar Sahni is a migrant from Basti, UP and has been a street vendor for 26 years. For the last 10 years, he has been a street vendor near the Lotus Temple. During the pandemic, his shop was closed for 18 months. Since he had no income, he took a loan of Rs 35,000.

Once the restrictions were eased and work resumed, MCD officers seized his soft drinks twice, the losses amounting to Rs 1,000–2,000 each time. He has two sons studying in a private school in the 10th and 7th grade respectively. "Income was non-existent during the pandemic and lockdown. However, the school didn't reduce the fees," said Mr Sahni. He did purchase a smartphone for them to study but the online classes weren't of any use.

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## **9. Name: Mr Sagir**

**Age: 36 years**

Sagir is a migrant from Giridih, Jharkhand and has been a street vendor for 20 years. He has a shop at the metro station near Gate no. 2, Kakaji Mandir. During the pandemic, his shop was closed for 12 months. When his shop reopened, police started harassing him. On 13th July 2023, the Sub-Inspector (SI) threatened him saying, 'I will issue a

challan of Rs 500 daily and will seize your cart (redi). I want to see who will come to rescue you'. Mr Sagir said that the SI doesn't threaten everyone but six or seven vendors—Sahid, Nitin, Sonu, Aalim, Raj Singh, and Sagir.

**During the lockdown, he borrowed Rs 60,000 from his friends. He has also taken a PM SVANidhi loan.**

The police issued him with four challans after the pandemic. He has been surveyed as a vendor and possesses all the documents and proof required for vending.

## **KAROL BAGH, NEW DELHI**

**10.Name: Ms Beena (sells tea)**

**Age: 52 years**

**Family: Two members**

Beena is a Dalit migrant from Kolkata. She has been a street vendor for over 30 years and plies near Gate no. 1 of Sir Ganga Ram Hospital metro station. In 2008, her only son aged 17 years passed away. Her husband could not recover from the death of their son and fell ill. Their shop was closed for five years. In 2019, when they reopened the shop, MCD officials seized her goods. She had to sell her gold chain to recover the goods. Later in the same year, when MCD officials came for inspection, she was abused with the casteist remark, 'chuda-chamar'.

Her goods were seized one more time in 2019. However, she had nothing to sell and no money to pay and recover the goods.

**Distress: livelihood and financial loss, and harassment**

In 2020, during the pandemic, her shop was closed for eight months. She and her husband live in a rented home and during the pandemic, their owner used to lock the main gate in an effort to not let people out of their house for fear of the virus. This had a direct impact on their livelihood. During the tougher times of the pandemic, they relied on the temple for food.

When she finally reopened her shop after eight months, MCD officials seized her goods 15 times. Having suffered enough harassment from the officials, she narrated her story in a letter and addressed it to the Prime Minister. After this, a policeman approached her and told her to write, "No policeman has tortured me" and sign it. She refused to do so.

She stated that later on, an advocate had called her. She doesn't know what the advocate did but suspects he did something online as no police or MCD officials have troubled her since the call.

Since the pandemic, her income has reduced by 60%. Earlier, she used 25 litre of milk every day for tea. Now, it has come down to less than 10 litre a day.

She took a PM SVANidhi loan of INR 10,000. After completing the payment of the loan, she took another loan for INR 20,000. She has been surveyed as a vendor and possesses all the necessary documents required for vending.

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**11.Name: Ms Asha (sells tea, parantha, drinking water)**

**Age: 40 years**

**Family: Four members**

Asha is a migrant from Allahabad, UP and has been a street vendor for almost 20 years.

**Distress: livelihood and financial loss**

The day the lockdown was announced, she only had two kilograms of rice at home which got used up quickly, leaving her family hungry for two days. Her shop was closed during the first and second wave of the pandemic, leaving her family with no source of income and food. However, a little later, she was hired to clean train toilets for Rs 5,000 per month. She continued with this work to feed her family until the lockdown was lifted. Once the lockdown was lifted, she resumed vending.

Since the pandemic, her income has gone down by 75%. Earlier, she used over five kilograms of wheat flour for paranthas. These days, she barely uses more than one kilo. Her sons' studies were affected during the pandemic. However, they have now resumed classes and continue with their education.

**Debt:**

To sustain herself and her family, she sold her gold ornaments for Rs 60,000. She also took a loan of Rs 5,00,000 from relatives to meet household expenses and repay her house loan. She has a debt of Rs 20,00,000 (inclusive of house loan).

She has been surveyed and possesses all the necessary documents required for vending.

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**12.Name: Mr Gopal Yadav (sells fruits)**

**Age: 52 years**

**Family: Four members**

Gopal Yadav is a migrant from Sant Kabir Nagar, UP and has been a street vendor for almost 30 years. He has two children. His daughter is in college, and his son is in the 10th grade.

**Distress: livelihood and financial loss**

During the pandemic, his shop was closed for two months. When he did try working, he was promptly removed by the police. This resulted in his fruits, worth Rs 40,000, getting spoiled.

At present, he has a regular income from vending but his income has come down by 50%. Even if he works long hours, his income remains low and stagnant.

**Debt:**

He took a loan of Rs 3,00,000 to meet household expenses.

He took a SVANidhi loan of Rs 10,000. After repaying the loan, he took another loan for Rs 20,000.

He requests that designated space be allotted for street vendors to avoid traffic issues and stop the harassment from police and MCD officials. He has been surveyed and has all the necessary documents required for vending.

**13.Name: Mr Dilip Kumar (sells lemon soda, bhel puri)****Age: 45 years****Family: Four members**

Dilip Kumar is a migrant from Gorakhpur and has been a street vendor for 26 years. Earlier, he used to sell vegetables and had a vegetable shop. But this was demolished by MCD officials.

**Distress: livelihood loss, trauma, shame, harassment**

He has always had throat and respiratory issues and when the pandemic started, these were considered symptoms of having contracted the virus. While he was fairly certain he hadn't contracted the virus, he couldn't help but imagine the worst-case scenarios if he were COVID-positive. The shame and dread associated with the disease took a toll on him mentally. He couldn't work for six months. The pandemic severely affected his income and livelihood. At the time, different organisations used to distribute food to migrant labourers and other vulnerable communities. His family relied on food/ration distributed by these organisations. Shortly after, he travelled with his family to his native place.

When the lockdown was lifted, he resumed his work. He has two children, both of them in school. One of them suffers from a mental health issue and another one has Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy (DMD).

He has been surveyed and possesses all the necessary documents required for vending. Despite this, he is often harassed by police and MCD officials. At one point, he couldn't tolerate the harassment from the officials anymore and decided to leave Delhi and go back to his village. He recalls that nobody listened to his grievances. At the time of the pandemic, registering grievances was a difficult task. He also states that there needs to be a proper system in place to address grievances and redress the same.

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#### **14.Name: Mr Shankar Prasad (sells tobacco items)**

##### **Family: Five members**

Shankar Prasad is a migrant from Chapra, Bihar. He lives by himself in Delhi. His family, including his five kids, live in Bihar. Before the pandemic, he used to sell vegetables. However now, he has resorted to selling tobacco items under the Naraina flyover.

##### **Distress: livelihood and financial loss**

When the pandemic hit, his shop was closed for four months. At present, he is able to work but his income has come down by 40%. He requests that there be allotted space for street vendors so that they don't have to pay bribes to police and MCD officials.

##### **Debt:**

During the pandemic, he borrowed Rs 70,000 to make ends meet.

He has also taken a PM SVANidhi loan of Rs 10,000. When he completed the repayment, he took another loan of Rs 20,000.

He has been surveyed and possesses all the necessary documents required for vending.

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## **JWALA NAGAR, NEW DELHI**

#### **15.Name: Mr Suresh Kumar (sells spice)**

##### **Age: 63 years**

Suresh Kumar has been a street vendor for 48 years. During the first wave of the pandemic, his shop was completely closed and received no support from the government. During this time, police and MCD officials issued challans randomly without a specific reason. Some of the vendors gathered in front of the police station and questioned the random issuing of challan.

##### **Distress: livelihood and financial loss, harassment**

They harassed vendors and arrested and tortured Mr Suresh Kumar and others for two days. During these two days, Mr Suresh lost goods and spices worth Rs 2,50,000 in his shop. He lost all his income and had to borrow Rs 1,10,000 to sustain his family. He later filed a complaint with the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) regarding police harassment. The DCP intervened and issued strict orders to the police to not harass vendors.

His income from vending has come down by 75%. He stated that before the pandemic, there used to be more than 160 vendors in the market. But now, there are only 60–70 shops.

He has been surveyed but hasn't received the certificate of vending from authorities. He approached them multiple times to no avail.

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## **16.Name: Mr Ram Charan (sells food)**

### **Age: 57 years**

Ram Charan is a migrant from Uttar Pradesh and has been a street vendor for 15 years. He has no land in his native place and the only source of income he has is from vending.

### **Distress: livelihood loss, harassment**

Under the instructions of MLA Mr Ram Nivas Goyal, police and MCD officials seized all his utensils from his shop, stating that he was on government land and the flag hoisting would be done where his shop is situated. When he visited the MLA to get more clarity, he was told by the MLA 'to get out, no vending will be allowed'. Mr Ram states that he is a Dalit and people from his community visited his shop. There was a time when AAP party workers used to target him. And they saw the opportunity to evict him during the pandemic. He believes he was targeted for not supporting or praising the party.

When the lockdown was lifted, he somehow started vending again. But on 10th January, 2022, MCD and police officials seized his scooter, gas cylinder, cart, etc. He faced a total loss of Rs 1,70,000.

### **Debt:**

Due to the loss of livelihood, he had to take a loan of Rs 4,00,000. He hasn't been able to repay the loan.

**17.Name: Mr Ompal (sells tea, chole, kulcha, etc.)**

**Age: 42 years**

**Family: Five members**

In 2020, Judge Smt. Rekha Rani ordered the allotment of a permanent place for a kiosk in litigation with MCD. However, on 25th August 2022, MCD turned down the order of the Hon'ble Court and demolished the kiosk. Mr Ompal has the necessary certificates like the one from the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSI).

**Distress: livelihood and financial loss**

Before the demolition, he used to earn Rs 6,000 per month. He is a TVC member and used to raise his voice against the exploitation and extortion of his fellow vendors, and rampant corruption amongst police and MCD officials. He believes he was targeted by officials because of this. He has four children and after his shop was demolished and he lost all income. He borrowed money from his parents to meet his children's educational expenses. He borrowed a total of Rs 2,00,000 to sustain his family during the pandemic. He now makes ends meet by getting online orders from small sources he knows. However, the income from this is not sufficient to meet his family's expenses.

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**18.Name: Mr Imran (sells chicken roast)**

**Age: 27 years**

**Family: Four members**

Imran completed his B. Com and couldn't find a job. And so, he followed in his mother's footsteps and became a street vendor.

**Distress: livelihood and financial loss, harassment, children's education**

During the pandemic, his shop was closed for almost two years. His family faced food scarcity and lack of income. He managed to restart his work once the lockdown was lifted but the police and MCD officials wouldn't allow him to work. He had to find ways to discreetly run his shop. Recently, on 29th March, 2023, the police caught him vending and started thrashing him. He told them he was fasting and to show some mercy to which the officials responded by mocking him and asking him to seek the mercy of his God for the protection of his livelihood. Due to the assault by the police, the bones in his leg were fractured.



Imran took a loan of Rs 2,50,000 to sustain and feed his family. He has two kids, aged 6 and 4. They are not attending school because of financial distress. He has not been surveyed by the MCD.

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## **19.Name: Ms Dhanwathi (sells vegetables)**

**Age: 40 years**

Dhanwathi has been a street vendor for over 19 years and has a stall (redi). The day after the lockdown was announced, the police sealed the market entrance and exit. When the market was closed, she sold vegetables on the streets, changing location every once a while. Her goods were never confiscated but they were thrown away multiple times.

### **Distress: financial loss and harassment**

During the pandemic, she was injured as a result of a police lathi charge. Before the pandemic, she used to earn Rs 1,000 per day. Now, she hardly earns Rs 200 per day.

Her children studying in the MCD school continued their online education for almost a year. She has been surveyed and possesses all the necessary documents required for vending.

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## **20.Name: Ms Heena (sells fish)**

**Age: 28 years**

**Family: Three members**

Heena is the youngest of three siblings, and she lost her parents when she was young. She has been taking care of her family and married off both her elder brother and sister. Her brother is also a vendor.

### **Distress: livelihood and financial loss, harassment**

During the lockdown, she had to discreetly sell fish as there was no food at her home.

Once the lockdown was lifted, she resumed her work at the market but the MCD officials used to come around and verbally harass her. She travels for over two hours to reach the market and is constantly harassed by the police on the way. She had lodged a complaint but no action has been taken.

Recently, a few people from the MCD Committee confiscated her fish which cost around Rs 50,000, and also physically assaulted her. She hasn't received any help from the government or NGOs.

Three years ago, some vendors including her were promised a house. She deposited Rs 1,40,000, and although a house was allotted to her in Dwaraka, she has never received the house. She continues to live in a rented house where she pays Rs 8,000 per month as rent.

She said that the BJP Councillor Mr Pankaj Luthra wants to remove fish and meat from the market and had even made a few men sit in the market to keep an eye. She had to keep moving to escape them.

She has been surveyed and possesses all the necessary documents required for vending.

**Debt:**

She has a debt of INR 10,00,000 and hasn't been able to repay it.

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**21.Name: Ms Manju Kashyap**

**Age: 60 years**

**Family: Four members**

Manju Kashyap has been a street vendor for over eight years. During the lockdown, her shop was closed for three months. She managed her house expenses by being a domestic help in multiple houses. Unlike some cases, her landlord didn't bother her when the rent payment was delayed. Although her goods were never confiscated by the police and MCD officials, they were thrown away on multiple occasions to intimidate her. Since the pandemic, her earning has decreased drastically. She took loans from multiple sources to survive. Her only son passed away, and she has to look after her late son's wife and her two daughters. One child in 6th grade couldn't attend online classes as they could not afford a smartphone. They didn't receive any aid from the government or NGOs. She also couldn't procure rations as she doesn't have a ration card. She has been surveyed and possesses all the necessary documents required for vending. However, her LOR vending certificate hasn't been issued yet.

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**22.Name: Mr Mansaram (sells kulfi, fruits, peanuts, etc.)**

**Family: Four members**

Mansaram has been a street vendor for 30 years. During the first wave of the pandemic, he was thrashed by the police when he tried selling, and his goods were thrown away. Following this, he stopped vending for a while. He has two children: one is in the 9th grade and the other in 12th grade.

**Distress: livelihood and financial loss, harassment, discrimination**

One day, during the second wave of the pandemic, he collapsed at work and lost consciousness. He was taken to the government hospital but doctors there refused to admit him. He was forced to go to a private hospital for treatment. The hospital treated him for migraine, and the medical expenses were far greater than what he could afford as he had no money. Post his recovery, moneylenders started demanding their money back, and he had no option but to sell his house for a low price. Despite having a loan card, he is dismissed by the bank manager whenever he approaches the bank for relief. He also stated that he has faced discrimination at ration shops (PDS). He didn't receive any aid from the government or NGOs.

**Debt:**

He had to take a loan of Rs 8,00,000 from money lenders to meet hospital/treatment expenses, and home expenses, and to buy smartphones for his children's education.

He has been surveyed and possesses all the documents required for vending.



The PMSVANidhi was announced on 1 June 2020, and since then, it took two years for the Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs to identify 49.48 lakh street vendors as per their report released in February 2022. On 5 Dec 2023, the Ministry stated that the beneficiaries of the scheme totalled 56.58 lakh street vendors, and just two months later, in February 2024, the Finance Minister proudly announced in the interim budget that 78 lakh street vendors have benefited from the scheme.

The question that needs asking here is where the numbers are being sourced from—30 lakh extra people who benefitted from the scheme in a span of two years from 2022 to 2024—when it took the Ministry two years, from the announcement of the scheme in 2020, to simply identify the total number of street vendors. When the math doesn't add up, who is lying then? The Finance Minister, the Housing Minister or the data itself? With General Elections knocking on the country's door, it is hardly surprising that these tall claims, backed by no solid, verifiable data or basis, are being made.



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