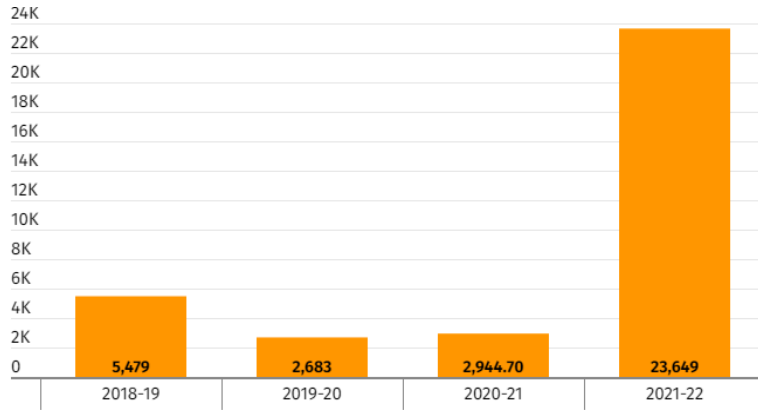


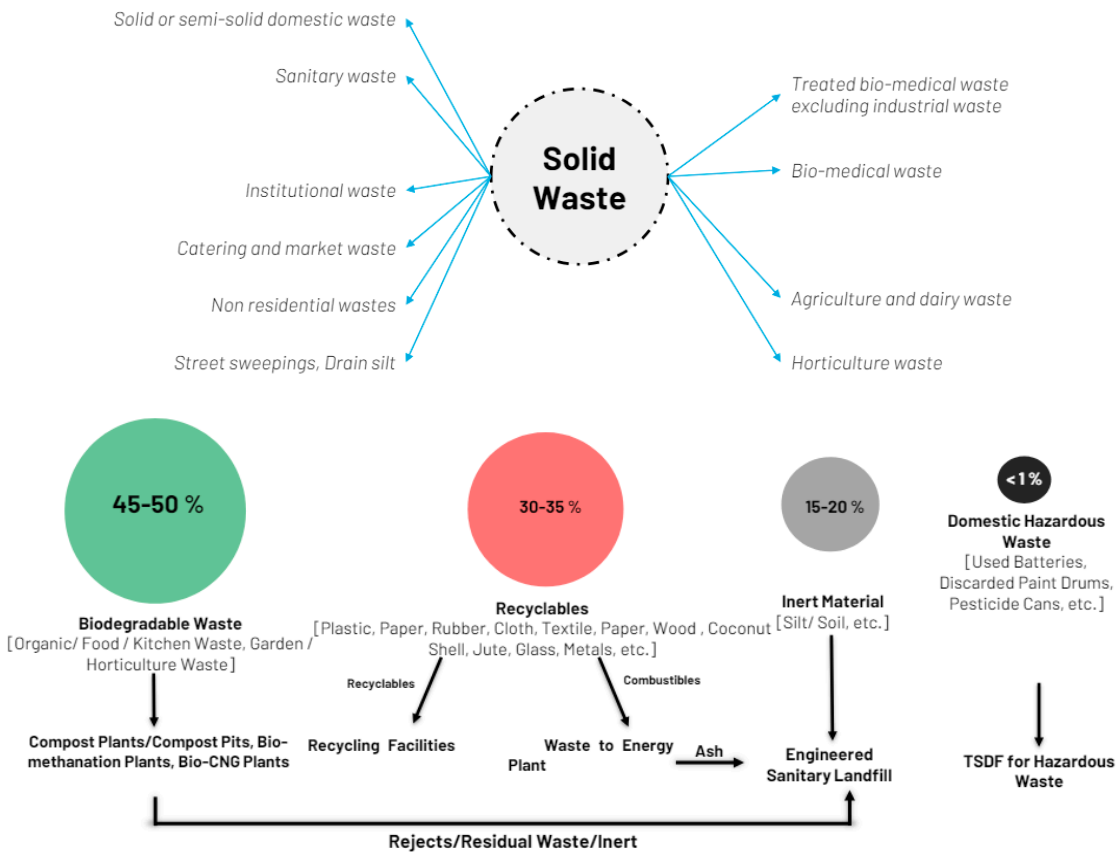
World of Work, Women & Waste

1. World of Waste

Delhi produces 11,000 tonnes of municipal solid waste per day, highest among all Indian cities. Over half of this ends up in landfills of Ghazipur, Bhalaswa, Okhla, Narela, Bhawana and Tuqalabad. Between 2018-19 and 2021-22, Delhi's hazardous waste quadrupled--almost 24,000 Metric tonnes of produced in 2021-22. In 2041, it is predicted that the city will generate 19,500 tonnes of solid waste every day.



Typology of solid waste and Delhi's waste breakdown



While waste management is among the major expenditures for local bodies, around 20 percent of the total municipal budget for the Municipal Corporation of Delhi, the failure of the waste management system is undisputed.

Waste pickers in informal employment collect over 80 percent of the total recyclable waste. Over 90% of the total e-waste generated in the country is processed by the informal waste management sector. On an average, a waste-collector can recycle up to 100 kg per day, and earn up to Rs.10,000 (US \$181) from waste picking a month. There are approximately 1.5 million and 4 million waste pickers in India, out of which Delhi itself has over 500,000. These workers in Delhi have mainly migrated from Bengal, Bihar, Assam and Uttar Pradesh.

The following Colonies work in waste recycling within the informal sector:

1. Kabadi Basti
2. Sangam Vihar (segregate at home, door-to door collection): waste pickers pick up waste early in the morning with a magnet end rod on which all metallic items stick. This happens in most of the colonies.
3. Dallupura, Bhalaswa, Harkesh Nagar
4. Tuqlakabad (from landfill- requires permission from contractor)
5. Madanpur Khadar - Jalebi Chawk

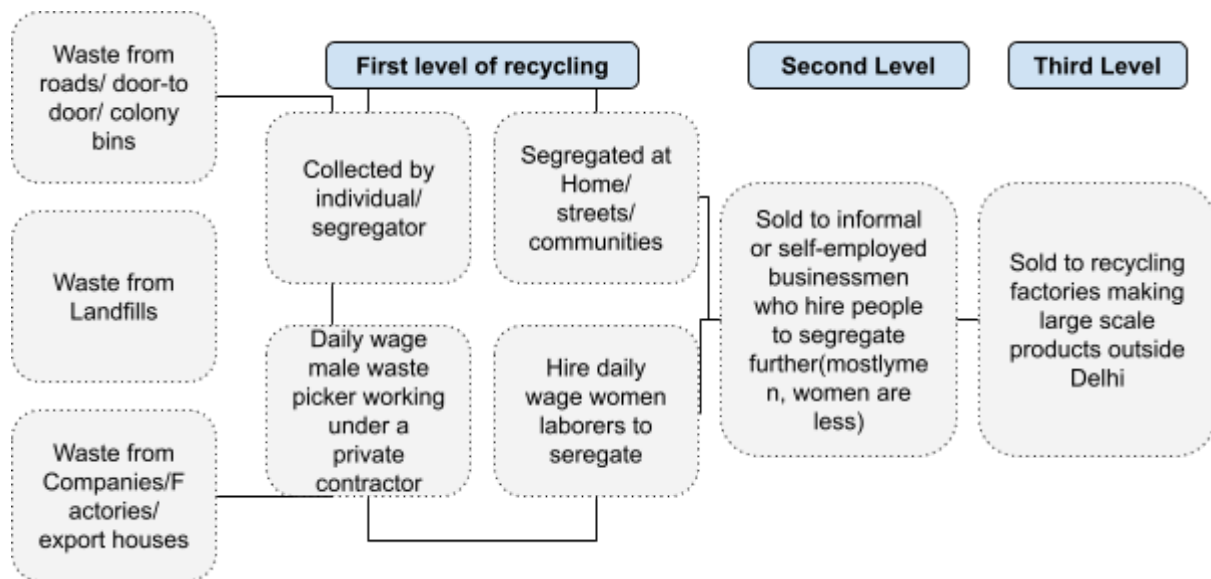
2. World of Work

2.1 Hierarchical Structure of the recycling Sector

The recycling sector is structured in the form of a pyramid, with the waste-collectors at the bottom, the junk dealers and segregators in the middle and the recycling industry at the top. At the bottom of the heap are the waste-pickers that engage in the collection of scrap. Marginally above them are the itinerant buyers who purchase small quantities of scrap from households. Between the waste-collectors and reprocessors are various levels of traders including retailers, stockists and wholesalers. The reprocessors are in a class by themselves.

Most of the rag-pickers are not independent but work for middlemen or contractors who purchase segregated rag from them, on pre-decided rates. Rag-pickers are considered to be self-employed. They do not come under the purview of any labour legislation. There is no employer, government or office that is empowered to look after them. They usually enter the occupation as children and continue till physically incapacitated.

Within the informal sector in the waste recycling work, there are many workplaces/sites at which segregation happens such as Companies, Door to door, Dumpsite, Fixed, Landfill, Open, Other, Recycling center, Slums, Sorting center, Street, and Home.



Based on ground reality in Delhi

2.2 Livelihood and plight of the waste recyclers

There are several trade unions working for the rights of waste workers such as All India Kachra Sramik Mahasangh, Delhi, Kachra Kamgar Union (KKU), Safai Sena, Self Employed Womens' Association (SEWA).

Why these trade unions are necessary is because of the plight and lack of bargaining power of an individual worker. A study conducted by the National Labour Institute (NLI) in 1997-98 found waste picking to be the fourth largest occupation for street children in Delhi.

A majority (60.54%) of them earn below Rs 200 a day; 30.86% earn between Rs 200-500 a day while just 8.61% earn over Rs 500 a day through waste picking. Within such low earnings, they have to account for rent, ration, electricity, drinking water, education fees, and medicinal expenses.

Even this low earnings is under threat due to **privatisation of waste collection - incineration by the government, burning of landfills, waste to energy plants and implementation of GST** in the recycling sector.

'The residents held a press conference on April 6, demanding to know why the government was poisoning residents with toxic fumes and stealing livelihood from thousands of rag-pickers.'

After the GST implementation, many of them MSMEs went out of business and informal workers faced reduced incomes because 12% GST is levied from recyclable products like plastic, paper, glass, iron scrap, etc when dealers of scrap sell these to recycling units.

Recycling is one of the cheapest, fastest ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Recycling reduces emissions 25 times more than incineration does (Tellus Institute 2008) — yet privatised incineration increasingly displaces waste pickers around the world.

3. World of Women

3.1 Health conditions of the waste pickers and segregators

Working in Informality brings with it lack of contract, safe working conditions, worker rights and unhygienic environment, making the poor weaker economically, physically and socially. Without hazard-protection equipment such as masks, gloves or boots, they come in direct contact with toxic material and acquire respiratory and gastro-intestinal infections. There is no facility of washrooms let alone disinfectants, equipment, safety uniforms provided by the contractors.

Unhygienic working and living conditions also disproportionately affect women. Girls are often married at a very young age and bear many children which take a toll on their physical and mental health. Due to lack of medical facilities in the slum, most deliveries are often done at home. When the main earner in a family falls very sick, he or she is packed off to the village to recover. The government hospitals, they alleged, do not want to treat them and they have to opt for expensive private dispensaries.

Water access and better sanitation is a key issue for the community as water-borne diseases often break out during monsoons. Drinking water has to be purchased. People resort to adding chlorine tablets in the water to keep their water clean.

The majority of these children have either dropped out of or have never been to a school and spend the entire time around wasting playing or helping their parents. The problem of child labour and those of waste-picking children cannot be seen or solved in isolation. Issues like infant mortality, malnutrition, unemployment, bonded labour, lack of educational facilities, the explosion of population, pervasive poverty, and worker's growing helplessness are all knotted threads in the web of the problem.

Waste pickers are exposed to various occupational hazards, physical, chemical, and biological, and encounter numerous impediments to the attainment of optimal health and well-being, in access to information; strategies for disease prevention, management, and rehabilitation; economic and social security; and opportunities for health promotion and recreation.

Some common health problems are:

1. Back pain/ Body ache
2. Intestinal diseases (diarrhoea, blood with stool, constipation)
3. Sore throat, cough, fever
4. trouble breathing
5. Skin Disease
6. Fatigue, Anaemia
7. Asthma
8. Sprained foot
9. Joint dislocation
10. muscle tear
11. Scratches/ injuries
12. Fracture
13. Burns
14. Exposure to hazards (neglected medicines, bandages, dead animals, paints and batteries, sharp objects,
15. Nausea, vomiting, stomach ache
16. UTI
17. Eye problems; loss of eyesight, Red eye, watering, swelling

3.2 Gender based violence

Harassment is a significant problem. Treated as nuisances by authorities and with disdain by the public, waste pickers are usually ignored within public policy processes and may even be arrested or physically assaulted. They face exploitation and intimidation by middlemen, which can affect their earnings.

4. Dallupura

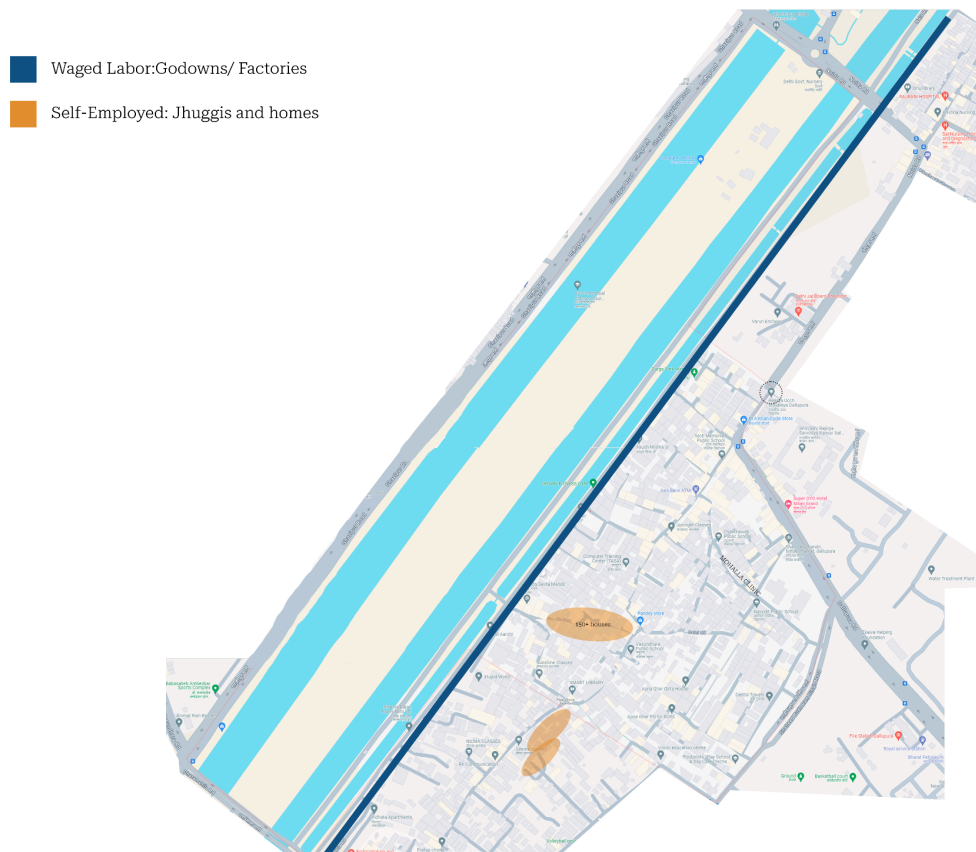
Case Study (1): Kiran (Health & GBV)

Group Study (2)

4.1 World of Waste

Dallupura is a village in East Delhi on the outskirts of the Trans-Yamuna region of Delhi, India. This is Gurjars village of Dedha's. Nearby is a Mayur Vihar Treatment Plant. Other than waste segregators, there are domestic workers and wage laborers in companies who reside in this neighborhood.

The area has pockets of jhuggis working in the first level of recycling all kinds of waste such as cardboard, glass, plastic, food, metal etc. Additionally, there are multiple factories where the second and third level of recycling of plastic and metal waste is undertaken. Both the places fall under the realm of the informal sector.



Based on field visit in Delhi

The waste comes from all across Delhi NCR. and travels to factories in Narela, Bhawana, UP, Haryana.

Rates at which the waste is sold from first level to the second is as follows:

Cardboard - 8-10 per kg

Baal - 4000 per kg

Plastic - 50 per Kg

Mirror - 3 per kg

Metal- 20-30 per kg

4.2 World of Work

There are two levels of engagement in the area with waste recycling:

- a) **Daily wage labourers working in factories dealing with second or third level of segregation** (labour force in informal enterprises linked to capitalist enterprises in the formal economy): Female laborers undertake the work of segregation earning INR 250 per day with no leaves. Male laborers collect waste, transport them between factories, and take care of loading and unloading; earning around INR 600 per day. Number of male workers is significantly higher than female.
- b) **Self employed segregators running family enterprises outside the circuit of capital:** This includes 300+ homes (1200+ people) in Dallupura. Female laborers segregate waste at home. Male labourers go door-to-door and in colony's to collect waste and unload in their homes. Both female and male workers are equal in number (husband-wife).

And,

The vendors in both the scenarios come to the segregators to purchase the waste.

The workers living in Dallupura have migrated majorly from Bihar and Bengal.

4.3 World of Women

Gender Based Violence: There are approximately 10-15 cases of domestic violence registered in a month from the area. And largely involves alcohol-linked abuse. Some say, the heat and poverty makes it unbearable for men making them rely on alcohol. However, it disproportionately impacts women. Mahila panchayat, also confirms there are cases of harassment by the contractors in the godowns and inappropriate requests made to the female labour force outside the office hours.

The lack of legal aid and awareness leads to low reporting. The fear of losing work and social reputation are other reasons for bearing with the ongoing abuse. With the help of police, Mahila Panchayat is able to support the women of the area. While rape cases are also on the rise, the minor cases is a common occurrence within them. Compensation in such cases can go upto 5 Lacs. Due to active awareness work by multiple organisations and access to information, women happen to be reporting more these days as per the Panchayat.

Education: In the area of Dallupura, there are 21 Anganwadis. However, there is no single one which caters to the locality where waste pickers live. Also, there are no creches. Thus, children of the waste pickers spend the entire day at home amidst the hazardous conditions. Their presence also requires the mother to pay attention and take care, often making her juggle between tasks of home and tasks of waste segregation.

For families who have come to Delhi for educating their children along with earning livelihood, send their children to Rajkiya Public School. For many the reason to come to Delhi is to solely earn a livelihood. so , in case there is no work they plan to go back. Thus, enrolling children to school is seen as an unnecessary task. Additionally, the lack of documents makes it an even more difficult step.

There is a Ben who teaches students at home in the morning including children of waste segregators. This easy and accessible solution seems to be preferred over undergoing formal processes. *(Informality makes everything else also informal/unstable in the lives of the labor force.)*

Health: The working hours for wage labourers is 9 am - 6 pm with one hour break. The hours for family based enterprises is unfixed going up to 9 am - 9 pm. Often, the waste is found with expired medicines, chemicals, sharp objects, sanitary waste, human faeces.

Most families do not have their documents transferred forcing them to buy ration for money. Those who have it cannot sustain 4 kg flour and 1 kg rice alone. There has never been a health camp in the neighbourhood. Women take medicines from 'Bengali Baba.' The nearest hospital is 3 kms away, Lal Bahadur Shastri hospital.

Drinking water is purchased at 2 rs per litre. And most families have dug holes to build toilets in their homes. Sewage lines are open in the entire colony and nearby surroundings.

5. Harkesh Nagar

[Case Study \(3\): Sukiya, Saroj, Sunena \(Health\)](#)

[Case Study \(4\): Santosh \(GBV\)](#)

5.1 World of Waste

Harkesh Nagar is a Village/ Basti in South East Delhi. In 1975, a huge fire broke out, and a part of the land was handed to people who continue to live here. There is a sewage treatment plant nearby in Jasola. The neighbourhood is situated adjacent to the Industrial Phase of Okhla.

The people in the area work solely with textile waste. The waste is brought in from factories, export houses, tailor shops, fashion boutiques from across the city (Noida, Gurgaon, Okhla). It is bought by recycling factories, and companies (Panipat, Agra, Amruya). The segregated waste is sold from 1rs kg to 50 rs per kg. Each bag weighs around 80 kgs. The rate of waste is significantly declining.

There are two types of waste: one which is in small strips, this is used for converting into cotton, or yarn. The other is bigger strips which are sold per kg, and converted into joint fabrics and later into garments. Some of these garments are sold in the same market itself. Chindi is segregated by colour, size and pattern.

- Dumpsites turned into public services
- Family based waste segregators
- Daily wage laborers



Based on field visit in Delhi

5.2 World of Work

There are two levels of engagement in the area with waste recycling all at first level of recycling:

- c) **Daily wage labourers working for contractors:** Female labourers undertake the work of segregation earning INR 250 per day with no leaves. Male labourers collect waste, transport them between factories, and take care of loading and unloading; earning around INR 900 per day. Number of female workers is higher than male.

The workers work either in godowns or streets. The segregation is handled by a group of 7-8 women per contractor. While the collection, unloading and selling is taken care of by him. Contractor does not provide any leaves. The working hours are 9 am - 6:30 pm with one hour break. The washroom break is also fixed at 4:00 pm.

- d) **Self employed segregators running family enterprises outside the circuit of capital:** Female labourers segregate waste at home. Male labourers go to local tailors, companies, factories to collect waste and unload in their homes. Both female and male workers are often equal in number (husband-wife). However, male workers have **opportunities to undertake other jobs** (Pulling rickshaws, construction workers, export factories etc.) which the female worker doesn't have.

And,

The vendors in both the scenarios come to the segregators to purchase the waste.

The workers living in Harkesh Nagar have migrated majorly from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

5.3 World of Women

Gender Based Violence:

There are 20 cases a month on an average recorded of domestic violence from Harkesh Nagar. The various types of violence includes, Mental including verbal (most), Physical, Alcohol, Economic, Separation. There are cases recorded of **violence at workplace**, economic violence, rape cases and assault, though very less in number in comparison to domestic violence. The awareness has increased yet women don't report easily due to social reputation, and fear of losing work.

The process of filing a FIR is long thus first there are rounds of counselling with the couple. Even after repeated efforts, if the matter is not resolved, it is taken to courts, CAW, DCW, DALSA.

It is men who deal with the **finances** with very little or no control of money. The pay parity is as much as men receiving more than twice the money women receive. While women manage both house and work.

It is also critical to note that the **mobility of women** is fairly low. They hardly travel anywhere outside their locality. It is due to fear of harassment, lack of money, lack of time, freedom and responsibility of children.

Health:

People working away from landfills experience health issues due to long working hours, lack of washrooms, hygiene and dust. Many, even if they work in their homes, don't have access to personal washrooms. In many colonies, there is no washroom. They use community/public toilets which are 1 for 25-30 people.

Nearest hospital is Safdarjung. There are many accessible and affordable options such as the mohalla clinic. Srinivaspuri Hospital, AIIMS, Kalkaji dispensary which the residents use.

However, the challenge is to maintain health. They have to eat healthy, keep surroundings hygiene and the hazards at the workplace are completely unavoidable. The low income doesn't allow it. Instead the work adds the burden of health on them. Working in an open environment in Delhi's heat and lack of access to washrooms further deteriorates women's health. White Discharge and TB is another highly recorded health issue. In case the women fall sick at work, neither there is awareness nor agency for women to speak with the contractor for his share in the treatment.

To access ration, one must have documents of Delhi which many don't have. For those who do, the ration is 4 kg flour and 1 kg rice not sufficing the basic needs of a person both nutrient wise and quantity wise.

Education: There are Anganwadis in the area where children go to. It enables mothers to work alone for a few hours, keeps children away from dirt, provides education, meals and support to pregnant mothers. Some enrol into schools as well after graduating from Anganwadis. And anganwadi also supports their enrollment. Many children also stay at home all the time with mothers who segregate at home. For women who work in godowns, they have to ensure their children are safe at home. Contractor does not allow children and there is also not enough space for them to be accommodated. There used to be a creche but it is not shut down due to lack of space.

In 2022, anganwadi was provided with a new pre education kit by the government which has attracted many more children to the space. After this, the interest of mothers have also surged.

(in front of metro) Primary MCD Gov school: 1-5 year both girls and boys study together
Senior secondary MCD Gov school: 6-18 years girls: morning, boys: after 1 PM
Government pays a 1000 rs per class to attend school. With each class, the amount increases.

In adults the literacy ration would be 5: 100.

Comments on Informality and Trade

The impact of informality can be seen on an extreme level in the trade of waste picking. The home-based nature of work becomes more exploitative when the conditions at home multiply with the nature of work. For example, the lack of a personal washroom means that there is no access to the washroom during the working hours as well. Each home has a different kind of engagement with the trade based on what is available and not available at home.

The trade of waste segregation navigates between communal and individual work. Many people who migrate and settle in a certain community, pick up the same trade as others. Over the years, entire colonies have been doing the same work. This collectivisation brings little power to them and attracts more businessmen. However, the everyday battle of each family differs and remains an individual challenge.

Men and women both are stuck in poor living conditions. Yet it disproportionately affects women. Men have the chance to work in any other trade, travel and go outside, rest for a few hours. But women strictly sit at home or move within the same neighbourhood to segregate waste. The fear of harassment, lack of money, lack of time, family responsibility and freedom makes women very much dependent on their male counterparts.

Permanent housing is an immediate requirement. With the increasing impact of climate change, it is unsafe to stay for waste pickers in such temporary plastic based settlements with huge piles of waste. There is a high risk of fire hazards.

Lastly, unlike trades such as domestic work or home-based work, women don't recognise segregation at home (family-enterprise) as work.