

Efficacy of RERA Web Portals

The Real Estate (Regulation and Development (R&D)) Act, 2016 aimed to set up Real Estate Regulatory Authorities (RERA) for the regulation and promotion of the real estate sector in a transparent and accountable manner. One of the important elements introduced by the Act was a web portal to be maintained by RERA, which would provide information on real estate projects. This policy brief reviews the RERA websites of 20 different states and union territories (UTs) to see how they fared on user-centricity and transparency on project information and suggests further improvements that can be made.

1. What does the Act say about RERA Websites?

The Real Estate (R&D) Act, 2016 mandates that every state and UT form its own Real Estate Regulatory Authority and frame rules to govern the functioning of the Authority. The Act also mandates the Authority to maintain an online portal, which would empower homebuyers to make informed decisions when buying their dream homes as well as enable them to take stock of the status and approvals of future homes in which they have invested. As per sections 4, 7, and 34 of the Act, the authorities should have operationalised the online portal for submitting applications for project/agent registration within one year from the date of its establishment. The promoter can then create their web page on the RERA website and enter all details of the proposed project for public viewing, including the relevant documents.¹ The Authority should then publish and maintain a website of records for public viewing of all registered real estate projects and real estate agents, along with the details that were uploaded by the applicant. The detailed database must also include names and photographs of promoters and agents who are defaulters, or for whom registration has been revoked or penalised under the Act, with reasons.

¹ Each state/UT RERA has notified their own rules, which contain provisions on the information to be submitted by promoters and agents.

² The state/UT websites analysed include that of Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Goa, Gujarat, Haryana (Panchkula and Gurugram), Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, and Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

2. Status of State/UT Authority and Web Portal

As per the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, (MoHUA, 2023) all states and UTs in the country, except Nagaland, have notified rules under the Real Estate (R&D) Act. However, only 29 out of 36 states/UTs have operationalised their websites under the provisions of the Act.

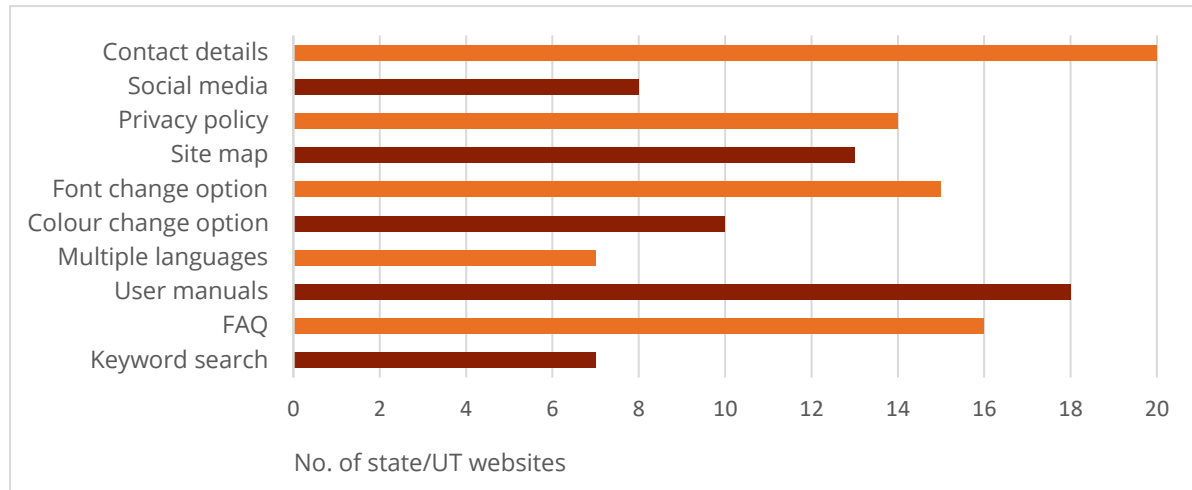
3. Efficacy of State/UTs RERA Portals

This policy brief examines the efficacy of 20 RERA websites on two specific aspects.² The first aspect is the basic functionality of the portal, including its performance, operability, and perceivability for users.³ This also includes ease of navigability and accessibility. A long-pending issue in the real estate sector has been the absence of reliable project information. As the second aspect, this policy brief assesses which details of registered projects are available on the RERA portals.

The objective of the policy brief is to reflect on broad improvements in transparency and efficiency that have been successfully achieved in majority of the states/UTs through these websites and to assess the need for further improvements.

³ From a statutory angle, the website should comply with the Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act, 2016, the Information Technology Act, 2000, and Section 42 of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016. From a technical angle, the websites should meet the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) guidelines and ISO 23026 Standard International Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG).

Figure 1: Website technicality and ease of navigation



Source: IHS analysis, January 2023

A. Basic Functionality of RERA Websites

To start with accessibility, all the 20 state/UT RERA websites display information in English as the default language, but some have the option of regional languages as well, including Hindi. They all list details of registered projects and agents, circulars and notifications, and contact details of officials. Very few websites provide a keyword search feature, which makes it harder for the user to search for information directly.

With regard to technology, all 20 websites have cross-browser compatibility. Goa, Punjab, and Telangana RERA websites perform better than others in terms of page performance.⁴

For promoters and agents who are required to register with the RERA, application forms are available online. All RERAs except Goa and Uttarakhand provide user manuals for filling out real estate project/agent registration applications. It was observed that most of the states have manuals, guidelines, and instructions on various online and offline modes of payment. However, almost one-third of the RERA websites do not provide a privacy policy regarding the uploaded information.

More than half of the websites have customisation features like font resizing and colour-changing options, which help people with

cognitive disabilities to access information. To make the websites universally accessible, they should also have audio assistance which is currently not available on any RERA website.

B. Availability of Real Estate Project Details

From a homebuyer/investor perspective, the availability of details of real estate projects on the website is of utmost utility. Information on project approvals/no objection certificates (NOCs) helps a potential buyer to verify whether all the required approvals have been granted and whether the amenities promised by the developer are indeed part of the approved plans. Thus, the key criterion for analysis was to visualise what potential as well as existing homebuyers or investors would find useful on the RERA website. The identified parameters were categorised into basic details of projects, details of the built-up structure and project cost, approval details, and details on the status of projects.

Basic details of real estate projects

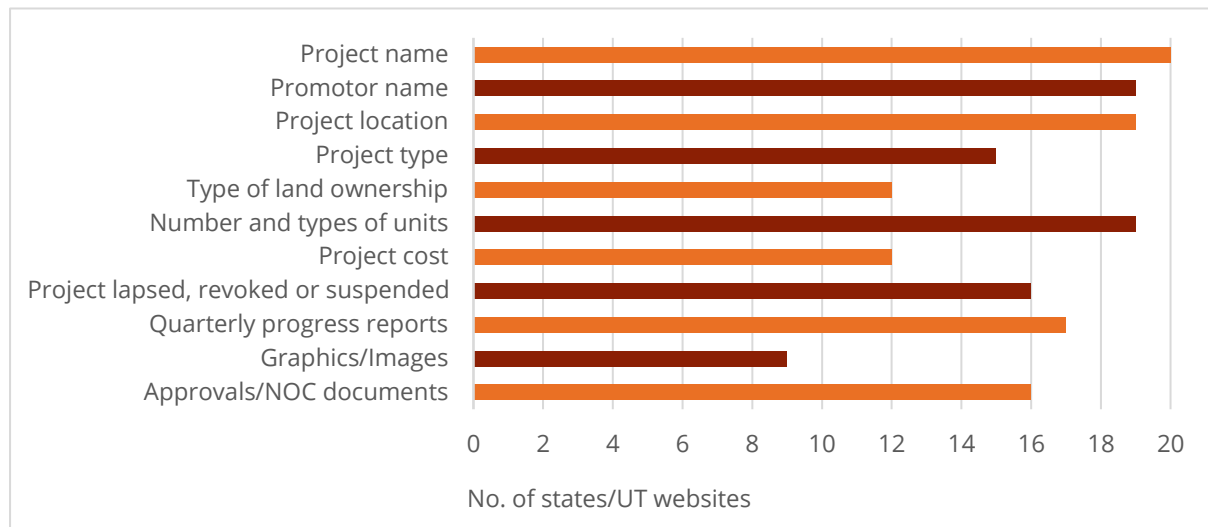
All state/UT RERA websites offer basic project information, including the name of the project and its location in terms of administrative area.⁵ Seven of these websites offer geographical coordinates for project locations.

⁴ To understand and extract website features and details, web-based search engines such as Website Grader and Nibbler were used. Even with limited accuracy, they are considered as some of

the ideal tools for search engine optimisation (SEO) and marketing purposes.

⁵ Administrative area includes district, block, or city.

Figure 2: Availability of project details



Source: IHS analysis, January 2023

Majority of the websites list the name of the developer and the project type.⁶ Around 12 states either provide information on the type of land ownership offered to the developer by the landowner, or upload details of the property records, or do both.⁷

Project status and progress

Over 80 per cent of the websites provide a list of projects for which RERA registration has lapsed, been revoked, or suspended. Seventeen state/UT RERAs provide information on project progress through quarterly progress reports (QPR), but developer-compliance on this may vary within the state. Chhattisgarh and Punjab RERA websites provide an option to filter a list of projects based on their percentage of completion, which is a good practice. Images of projects, showing whether they are fully constructed or under construction, are uploaded on 9 RERA websites.

Details of built-up structure and project cost

Almost all RERA websites offer information on the area of the project and details on how many units are to be constructed. More than half of the websites offer information on the project’s total cost. The Punjab RERA website offers a drop-down list of project costs and areas in the search menu. The Himachal Pradesh RERA website provides search options using the area of the project.

Availability of project approval documents

Project approval documents are available on more than three-fourths of the assessed RERA websites. However, the information presented across states has variations. On the Goa and Gujarat RERA websites, approval in the form of NOCs from the development authority is available. Similarly, in the case of the Himachal Pradesh RERA website, a license certification from the development authority is available. Other approval documents either from development authorities or Town and Country Planning Departments are available on Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, and Tamil Nadu RERA websites. Very few websites provide project completion certifications from the competent authority.

4. Recommendations

The website analysis reveals that significant progress has been made in the last six years. The portals can be further improved by standardising some basic information, ensuring regular update of project information, and improving overall user-centricity.

A. User Centricity of Websites

RERA websites need to be realigned, keeping the user at the centre of website design and of all information being conveyed.

⁶ Project type refers to residential, commercial, mixed, industrial, flats, plots etc. as applicable in the state.

⁷ Land ownership may be freehold or leasehold.

- A user survey can be conducted to identify existing gaps in the functioning of the website, accompanied by a review of the structure of the web pages of the website.
- Overall statistics on the number of projects and agents, complaints received, and complaints approved, disposed of, rejected, or revoked can be displayed on the home page to promote transparency.
- Users can be provided with multiple options in order to narrow down a search as per their needs and preferences.
- Websites can adopt features like ease of access to its citizens, language change, ease of searchability of information, accessibility menus, and mobile and tablet device optimisation.

RERA portals of Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh, which were recently revamped, are now more accessible and user-friendly than their earlier versions. This shows that different state/UT RERAs are also improving with time and experience, and this must continue.

B. Regular Updates

As per the Real Estate (R&D) Act, it is mandatory for the promoters to update the details of projects every quarter.⁸ The QPR is crucial as it helps buyers make decisions based on verifiable project status, and also helps RERAs to assess whether a project is on track for timely delivery. RERAs must ensure that QPRs are updated for all projects regularly and are available in the public domain.

Each website should also upload a list of complaints easily identifiable against projects, agents, and promoters. Copies of the complaints

and copies of the judgment pronounced by the Authority should also be summarised, if needed, and uploaded in real time.

C. Uniformity in RERA Websites

The Real Estate (R&D) Act prescribes a standardised set of information on projects to be made publicly available through the RERA websites, thereby encouraging transparency in the sector. However, this does not seem to have occurred uniformly.

RERAs need to ensure that at least within the state, there is uniformity in the format used to upload and publish project details. Similarly, there should be a standardised structure for the uploading of project documents.

RERAs across states can collaborate with each other for adopting a common format to present project information, interlink details of past projects of promoters, and share milestone judicial orders. Patel and Mankad (2022) suggest creating a model document for RERA portals.

D. Benchmarking of RERAs

The exercise highlights that despite deriving their origin from the same Act, there are several variations amongst the RERA websites. This is a reflection of the variation in the functioning of RERAs themselves, which in turn may depend on the state's economic and political context, the significance of real estate in the state's economy, and consumer awareness, among other factors. It is important that a larger benchmarking exercise be carried out across states, to understand how each of the RERAs are performing in terms of transparency, efficiency, and accountability.

Bibliography

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⁸ Section 11(1) states that the promoter shall quarterly update the number of apartments/plots booked, number of garages booked,

list of approvals taken, list of approvals pending, and status of the project.