

Women's Labour Workforce In India

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Abstract

This research paper analyses Indian Women's participation in the workforce, their protection from various kinds of discrimination, the problems they face at work, and the reasons for their low participation rate. India currently stands at 140th position among the 156 countries in the FLFP (Female Labour Force Participation), according to the World Economic Forum, 2021. Their participation rates differ in different sectors and rural and urban areas. To bring more women into the labour force, several measures have been taken by the government, which also works for the empowerment, security, and development of women. Indian women are majorly involved in household chores, especially in rural areas where the women's labour force rate is also lower. The working age is measured as that between 15 and older, and as per the Annual Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) Reports, the estimated Labor Force Participation Rate (LFPR) for years 2022–23 was 37%, slightly more than the last year. Analysing the PLFS data, about 78% of Indian women are majorly involved in the agricultural sector. The data suggests that, even though a major population of working women is still involved in agricultural activities, there are now more opportunities available for them in other sectors too. The increase in education, and decrease in fertility rates with better healthcare services have ensured more women's participation in labour. This paper revolves around the rates of FLFP (Female Labour Force Participation) in some recent years in rural and urban areas, along with their comparisons with those of other countries. The research has also found some reasons for the higher participation rate of women in other countries, and finally, it mentions the schemes, programs, and codes that the government of India has implied for boosting the FLFP (Female Labour Force Participation).

Introduction

Women's labour force participation in India has been through a lot of changes and is currently a vast concern that is affecting our nation's socio-economic development. The labour force participation is mainly driven by the market value of their market wages versus the value of their non-market time. Their market wages contribute to a huge share in the growth of our economy. Women's labour force participation comprises women aged 15 and older who supply labour for the production of goods and services during a specified period. According to the International Labour Organisation's modelled estimates, 24% of Indian women were part of the labour force market in 2022.

Female empowerment in our country has a very solid relation with them being employed, as it leads to their empowerment, promotes equality and boosts the utilisation of human potential. The fostering of economic growth and reducing poverty has encouraged them to take up employment in sectors other than agriculture. Among the states, the data has found that Himachal Pradesh has the highest proportion of women in the labour force constituting 49% of the workforce, during 2021-23, in the age group 15-59. This is significantly higher than the national rate of 32%. In

contrast, Haryana and Punjab had the lowest rate of female labour participation constituting only 21% and 26% of the workforce, respectively.

Economically independent women contribute to the welfare of our country and most importantly in the well-being of their family which provides them with an immense power to have control over their lives. They feel more confident and financially stable which puts them in a condition to stand for their rights. The working status upgrades their socio-economic condition, standard of living, and health conditions. Women's participation in labour has been in a major light all over the world and many countries have even achieved an immense increase in their labour force. In the early years after Independence, the proportion of women was mostly captured by the agriculture sector but in the recent decades, their labour force has spread in all the three sectors of the society. The significant focus of this year's budget on Nari Shakti or women empowerment through entrepreneurship, ease of living, dignity for them, and the increase in FLFP have been the reason for this topic being discussed recently.

Literature Review

For the provisions that the government has created regarding the participation of women's labour force, the Ministry of Labour and Employment "Advisory for Employers to Promote Women's Workforce Participation"¹ has been used. The measures taken by the government and all the details of the provision are mentioned in this file. To understand the participation rate of women and gender pay gaps that are an issue in their development, the Confederation of Indian Industry's discussion paper 'Declining Female Labour Force Participation in India: Concerns, Causes, and Policy Options' has been referred to. Trends, causes, and primary factors related to the decline in FLFP were found in this. The development of women in the labour market and society has been referred to in various other articles and research papers. The World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and Annual Periodic Survey Reports gave some major data related to the labour force in India as well as across the world. The research article, 'Female Labour Force Participation in India: Insights Through Time Use Survey' by A. Srija and Shirke Shrinivas Vijay has been used for an overview of employment opportunities in India in rural and urban areas. This paper has mentioned various schemes and changes that developed in the Female Labour force Participation rate, along with its comparisons with several other countries.

¹ <https://labour.gov.in/whatsnew/advisory-employers-promote-women-workforce-participation>

Describing the FLFP

Table 1: Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) in usual status (ps+ss) for persons of age 15 years and above all-India

Survey period	Rural			Urban			Rural+Urban		
	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female	Person
2022-23	80.2	41.5	60.8	74.5	25.4	50.4	78.5	37.0	57.9
2021-22	78.2	36.6	57.5	74.7	23.8	49.7	77.2	32.8	55.2
2020-21	78.1	36.5	57.4	74.6	23.2	49.1	77.0	32.5	54.9
2019-20	77.9	33.0	55.5	74.6	23.3	49.3	76.8	30.0	53.5
2018-19	76.4	26.4	51.5	73.7	20.4	47.5	75.5	24.5	50.2
2017-18	76.4	24.6	50.7	74.5	20.4	47.6	75.8	23.3	49.8

Note: (ps+ss) determined considering both principal activity status and subsidiary economic activity status

2022-23 refers to the period July 2022 - June 2023 and likewise for 2021-22, 2020-21, 2019-20, 2018-19 and 2017-18.

According to the latest available Annual Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) Reports, the estimated Labor Force Participation Rate (LFPR) on usual status for women of age 15 years and above in the country was 30.0%, 32.5%, 32.8%, and 37% during 2019–20, 2020–21, 2021–22, and 2022–23, respectively. But the men’s labour force, i.e., 76.8% in 2019–20 to 77.0% in 2020–21, is much higher than women’s. As per the latest PLFS Report, there is an increasing trend in the female labour force, and although it’s much lower than men’s participation, one-third of women in our country have joined the labour force. In 2017–18, 23.3% of women were in the labour force as compared to the recent 32.8%, i.e., there has been a surge of 9.5% during these years. The worker population ratio (WPR) of men and women in 2022–23 is 76% and 35.9%, respectively.

These indicators give a thorough clarification that there is still a lot of variation in the women’s working force. But even among these, this report has found that women in rural areas have a higher percentage of working women in comparison to those in urban areas. In 2022–23, 41.5% of women worked in rural areas and 25.4% in urban areas. The unemployment rate for females decreased from 5.6% in 2017–18 to 2.9% in 2022–23.

The Ministry of Women and Child Development (WCD) and the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) have launched a new survey on "increasing women's participation in the workforce." The Employees' Provident Fund Organisation is a statutory board, under the Ministry of Women and Child Development that encourages employees to save funds for retirement. The survey has a detailed questionnaire shared by the Organisation with its nearly 30 crore subscribers across the country. The survey has sought answers about whether there is 'equal pay work for men and women' workers. The employer rating survey was launched at the event "Women in the Workforce for Viksit Bharat" by the Ministry of Labour and Employment and the Ministry of Women and Child Development. The data shows an increase in the female labour force participation rate over the last few years but most of the increase was seen in the unpaid work category. The Periodic Labour Force Survey shows that female labour force participation increased to 37% in 2022-23 from 23.3% in 2017-18.

Women's Condition at Workplace

Women's work participation is determined by several factors, such as age, educational level, skill levels, wages, household income level, marital status, and several other economic, socio-political, and cultural factors. Even though the number of working women is increasing, there has been a stagnant increase in the percentage due to workplace conditions. Safety at the workplace is a major issue in the country. High rates of crime often dissuade women from taking up work, particularly in places further away from home. In the past, social reformers played an important role in spreading education to empower women. But still, women face a lot of visible and invisible discrimination in the workplace. Our Indian constitution has not discriminated against women and has even provided strong support for working women. In the Eighth Five-Year Plan, there has been a shift from 'development' to 'empowerment' of women. The lack of adequate infrastructure is another reason for the lack of employment, proper sanitation, adequate leaves, and biased wages in terms of men and women, which has caused a lot of challenges for women. The availability of a safe environment or the increasing number of crimes against women have been major reasons for the lower percentage of working women.

If women doing household chores for their families are paid for their work, then the amount paid to them would be equivalent to about 7.5% of India's GDP, according to the State Bank of India's Ecowrap Report². This brings our attention to the concept of paid and unpaid work done by women. Paid work is compensated with money, so it contributes immensely to our economy and is a major part of our country's GDP, but for unpaid work, no remuneration has been received, so it

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https://sbi.co.in/documents/13958/36530824/270723-Ecowrap_20230727.pdf/55c80d26-557e-81c0-4618-3a8979a69639?t=1690456745628#:~:text=India's%20global%20share%20in%20GDP,6.5%2D%25%20growth%20rate

dissolves into the value of nothing. Women in India share a large amount of their time taking care of their families, nurturing their children, cooking, and cleaning, which is unpaid work and thus remains outside the purview of economic policy. To understand the status of women in the labour market, it is necessary to grasp the nature of their unpaid work. As per the NSS report on 'Time Use in India 2019', which is a survey conducted to measure the active participation of women in both paid and unpaid employment activities, women's participation in domestic services has been recorded at 81.2% per day, while it is only 26.1% for men.

Impact of Budget 2023 and Interim Budget 2024

Women's involvement in the development of the country has changed in notable ways over the years. As the women in India breached the patriarchal walls and are joining the workforce at the moment, our country's Budget marks a significant value in boosting their enthusiasm.

India's growth is at 7% and the world has recognised the Indian economy as heading towards a bright future, but to achieve a growth target women play a major role as they constitute half of India's population. To empower women, the Union Budget 2023, presented by the Finance Minister, Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman has prioritised rural income growth and financial independence. She highlighted the success of the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana National Rural Livelihood Mission (DDY-NRLI) done through the government enabling Self Help Groups (SHGs) in the empowerment of rural livelihood. To achieve the next stage of economic empowerment 81 Lakhs Self Help Groups will be provided with the supply chain of raw materials, branding and marketing of products and designing operations. This is a step towards promoting Women Entrepreneurs.

A new one-time saving scheme for women called the Mahila Samman Saving Certificate was also announced. It will be available till March 2025 and offer a fixed rate of interest at 7.5%. A deposit of up to 2 lakhs can either be made in the name of a woman or a girl child for a maximum of a two-year tenure, under this scheme. The option to partially withdraw the money in emergencies is also available. This scheme is an important investment tool for women that will provide tax benefits under Section 80C of the Income Tax Act.

The Budget visualised a new scheme named Pradhan Mantri Vishwakarma Kaushal Samman (PM-VIKAS) for traditional artisans and craftspeople. Women constitute 56.13% of the total artisans occupied in the handicraft industry and this scheme further boosts their financial inclusion, social security, and skill enhancement through training and know-how of digital and green technologies.

The interim budget 2024 once again highlighted the importance of women-centric policies and reaffirmed Mahila (women), alongside Garib (the poor), youth and farmers, as one of the four

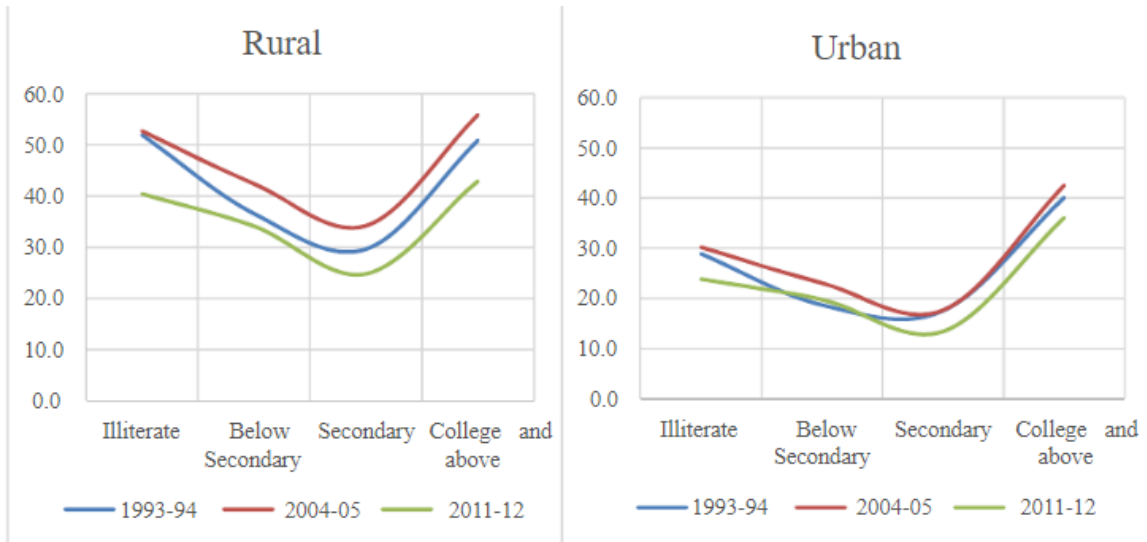
mainstays of the economy. As per the Periodic Labor Force Participation Report, the increase in female labour force participation in rural areas is caused by the increase in the “self-employed” category from 55.9% in 2017-18 to 70.1% in 2022-23. More women in rural areas are benefiting from the schemes like SHGs and skill development programmes. In urban areas, an increase in the regular salaried employed women will create a similar increase in the female participation rate in labour. As per the 2024–25 Interim Budget, allocations for the schemes for the safety of women have been increased from ₹321 crore to ₹955 crore. The G20 declaration emphasised a scheme that is meant to provide employment-oriented skill development training to women. As part of the initiative, the Union Cabinet approved ₹1,261 crore for financial years 2024–25 to 2025–26 to provide drones to 15,000 SHGs across states.

Reasons for the decline in FLFP

Factors such as economic development, education levels, fertility rates, access to childcare and other supportive services, and the cultural and normative context of society and social norms influence women's participation in the labour force. Although rapid economic growth, rising education, and decreasing fertility rates resulted in increased participation among women, there are still a lot of barriers to accessing their economic opportunities. While greater education leads to greater participation for men, it is not the same for women. Women in India have been subjected to a lot of constraints when it comes to their employment.

U-Shaped Relationship

The basic theories of human capital would suggest that with higher education, women acquire greater skills and their earnings increase, resulting in higher labour force participation. However, it has been long known that in India, women's education has a U-shaped relationship with labour force participation. Part of the decline at moderate levels of education may be due to an income effect whereby women with more education marry into rich families that enable them to withdraw from the labour force. Women who have tertiary education or no education display the highest rates of labour force participation in India. Men's privileged access to education and new technologies would displace women from the labour force during the early stages of development. But with further development, women gain access to education and technologies. This causes the U-turn for FLPR to increase.

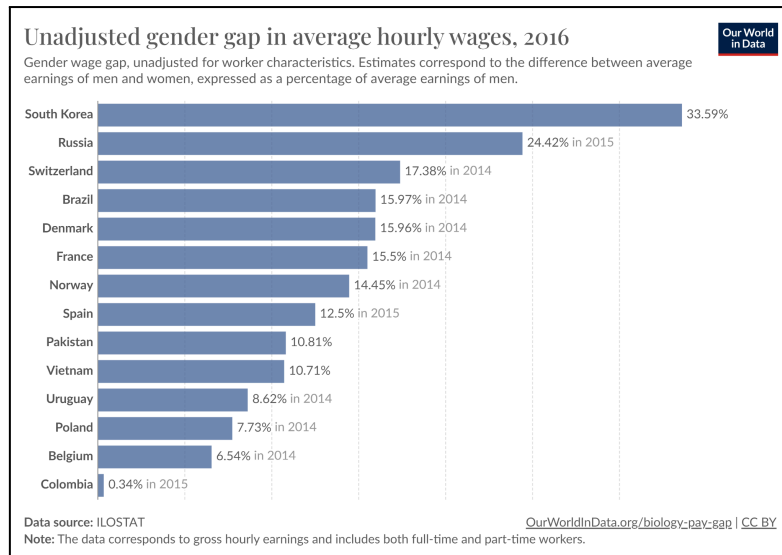


Source: Authors' own estimate based on NSSO data.

Gender-Pay Gap

According to the Ministry of Agriculture's data, the all-India average daily wage rate for field labour (male) during 2021–22 was ₹364/day and for females was ₹304/day³. The variation between wages of male and female agricultural labourers for the same category of work has been observed, and it is approximately 21% at all India levels. The gender wage gap in India differs from state to state. In the salaried class, a man earns more than a woman. The Periodic Labour Force Surveys have been measuring the gender earnings gap across various forms of employment, and it revealed that women on average work fewer hours than men, attributed to social pressures. The labour force participation rates of women in rural areas who are significantly self-employed have been increasing, but their working hours have fallen from 37.1 in 2019 to 30.1 in 2023. This indicates the part-time nature of women's employment as compared to men's full-time employment. When we consider the hourly earnings of women in regular work, the gap reduces. In 2023, men in regular work earn more than 24% over the week as compared to women. The gap in hourly earnings, therefore, is only around 4%, falling from 11% in 2019. Less working hours for women are not the outcome of inequality or the pure and unconstrained choice, but the social norms that require women to do domestic work, household duties, and nurture their children, which leave them with no choice but to seek a job with fewer hours of work. As per the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy's (CMIE) Report, the job security between males and females was highly unequal during the COVID-19 lockdown, while 61% of male workers had secure jobs only 19% of female workers had that privilege.

³ <https://desagri.gov.in/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Final-Copy-2021-22.pdf>



The above estimates by the International Labour Organisation, measure the gender wage gap in different countries. In some countries the gap is positive- women earn less than men, while in some it's negative- men earn less than women- such as Malaysia. The gap is large in most countries but in some cases such as the UK, where the gap went down from almost 50% in 1970 to about 17% in 2016.

The World Economic Forum Gender Gap Index covers 146 countries, out of which 42 countries have improved their gender parity by 1 percentage point in 2022-23. The countries with the greatest increase in the score are Liberia, Estonia, Bhutan, Malawi, Colombia and Chile. India as per the report has 64.3 scores with only a 0.014 percentage points increase. Although no country has yet closed the full gender gap, the top nine countries that have closed at least 80% of their gap are Iceland, Norway, Finland, New Zealand, Sweden, Germany, Nicaragua, Namibia, and Lithuania. Iceland has taken the top position with 91.2% for the last 14 years, and it also continues to be the only country to have closed more than 90% of its gender gap.

The gender pay gap is often the consequence of different engagement of men and women in the workforce. A large no of the male population is appointed to managerial positions as compared to women. When women are managers they are more concentrated in human resources than strategic work which brings down the average salary of women workers than male workers. In the Global Wage Report 2018-19, the International Labour Organisation highlights that women work part-time jobs more than men do. Their responsibilities towards their families and household work are the reasons for this. One of the prominent reasons for the gender pay gap is Occupational Gender Stereotyping which undermines certain jobs as “female jobs”. It brings down their wages lower than the men as the employers undervalue their work. A larger number of women are likely to leave their jobs due to their filial obligations. To raise their kids or to care for older members of

the family, they take breaks and then lag in their work, which causes a decrease in their remuneration.

Social Causes

The rural areas have a larger female labour force and a higher economic activity rate, suggesting that poor women cannot afford to abide by the social expectation of female seclusion. The biased responsibility of women for household chores, child care and elder care significantly impacts their formal employment opportunities. Whenever the financial conditions of a family stagger, women join the workforce to provide for their family, and as household income per capita increases, women start to leave the workforce. Women often choose to work near their places and for a short period, so that they can provide for their family's domestic needs along with work. A major percentage of women are engaged in unpaid work, which has increased in recent years. Increased urbanisation and breakups into nuclear families are other possible reasons for this trend. It's been observed that household constraints trump financial need and individual preferences for job choice among women. The lack of demand for moderately educated women and occupational segregation could explain the Indian paradox of increasing family education and decreasing women's employment despite India's economic growth.

Industrial Segregation				
Year	Male-Female	SC-Others	ST-Others	OBC-Others
1983	0.34			
1993	0.35			
2004	0.40	0.29	0.35	0.19
2011	0.39	0.32	0.35	0.17
2017	0.42	0.28	0.31	0.14
2018	0.41	0.29	0.33	0.15
2021	0.41	0.28	0.32	0.15
Source: APU Report- Infosphere				

The above table shows the industrial segregation based on the Duncan Index which takes values between 0 and 1, where 0 represents no segregation and 1 represents complete segregation. In 1983, the segregation index between men and women was 0.34 and increased to 0.41 in 2021, which shows that gender-based distribution of work has increased during these years instead of decreasing.

The early post-reform era, between 1993 and 2004 saw the majority of increase in gender-based segregation across industries. The COVID-19 and post-pandemic hybrid work models have taken a positive turn in working women's favour, offering more flexible and innovative work options that include 'Work from Home' with increasingly empathetic work cultures.

Mechanism of Agriculture

As women perform more manual labour than men, this affected the female labour force participation in India. With the shortage of opportunities in non-farm sectors in rural areas, farm mechanisation is also a potential reason for the declining FLFP rate. Females working in the farm sector earn wages and have a huge economic impact on the sector.

Devaluation of Women's Labor

The casteist and patriarchal notions of purity and pollution where women are prohibited from certain jobs, especially in the food processing, sericulture, and garment industries. The gender wage gap at work and unpaid domestic duties are the interlinked factors that explain low FLFP.

Trends During COVID-19 and Post-Pandemic

Table 1: Labour force participation rates (in per cent) in usual status (ps+ss) estimated from PLFS (2017-18), PLFS(2018-19), PLFS (2019-20), PLFS (2020-21), PLFS (2021-22) and PLFS (2022-23)										
age group	rural			urban			rural+urban			all-India
	male	female	person	male	female	person	male	female	person	
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	
PLFS (2022-23)										
15 years and above	80.2	41.5	60.8	74.5	25.4	50.4	78.5	37.0	57.9	
all ages	55.5	30.5	43.4	58.3	20.2	39.8	56.2	27.8	42.4	
PLFS (2021-22)										
15 years and above	78.2	36.6	57.5	74.7	23.8	49.7	77.2	32.8	55.2	
all ages	56.9	27.2	42.2	58.3	18.8	39.0	57.3	24.8	41.3	
PLFS (2020-21)										
15 years and above	78.1	36.5	57.4	74.6	23.2	49.1	77.0	32.5	54.9	
all ages	57.1	27.7	42.7	58.4	18.6	38.9	57.5	25.1	41.6	
PLFS (2019-20)										
15 years and above	77.9	33.0	55.5	74.6	23.3	49.3	76.8	30.0	53.5	
all ages	56.3	24.7	40.8	57.8	18.5	38.6	56.8	22.8	40.1	
PLFS (2018-19)										
15 years and above	76.4	26.4	51.5	73.7	20.4	47.5	75.5	24.5	50.2	
all ages	55.1	19.7	37.7	56.7	16.1	36.9	55.6	18.6	37.5	
PLFS (2017-18)										
15 years and above	76.4	24.6	50.7	74.5	20.4	47.6	75.8	23.3	49.8	
all ages	54.9	18.2	37.0	57.0	15.9	36.8	55.5	17.5	36.9	
<i>2022-23 refers to the period July 2022 – June 2023 and likewise for 2021-22, 2020-21, 2019-20, 2018-19 and 2017-18</i>										

According to the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) Report, the participation of women in the labour force was 28.6% in 2019-20, the year before the COVID-19 pandemic, as compared to a higher proportion of men's 56.8%. The female labour participation rate in 2019-20 was 4.2 percentage points higher than that of 2018-19 but in the next year, i.e., 2020-21, the participation

of females increased by only 2.3 points and reached 25.1%. The impact of COVID-19 was highly felt on the jobs of female employees. The participation rate of men in the labour force largely remained the same. In the following year, the rate of female labour had a negative growth rate of 24.8%, less than the previous year. From the data, during the pandemic, women joined forces in the agricultural sector, increasing the participation rate in rural areas by 5 and 2.4 percentage points in the years 2019-20 and 2020-21. In 2021-22, women's share in the agriculture sector remained higher while men's share decreased.

Women employed in factories, low-skilled jobs and domestic labour have been hit hard by the pandemic. A large proportion of female labourers lost their jobs during the lockdown in the country. Due to men being more preferred for jobs than women, there have been a large number of women laid-offs around the country. To bring the economy back on track, women need to get back to their jobs post-pandemic. Skilling the labour force has been found as a solution. There has been a continuous surge in their participation, although it's at a lower rate than pre-pandemic. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals have also included skilling the female labour force as a part of gender equality. Women, in India, who have been a part of skill training programs, formal or informal, are part of the workforce. It provides them with a wide range of opportunities for work and occupational choices, and it further boosts their confidence in being employed.

Measures implemented by the government to increase FLFP

In India, the government has prioritised women's empowerment through various schemes, and several measures have been taken to improve their participation in the labour force.

1. The Factories Act, of 1948, of India in general regulates working hours and provides for weekly holidays, intervals for rest, and overtime pay for all factory workers. It prohibits women employees from working at night, i.e., between 10 p.m. and 5 a.m. to ensure women's safety, but, its effect, however, was felt the opposite. In the 1990s, despite reduced trade barriers and increased trade, female participation in export-oriented and manufacturing jobs fell, which was likely the effect of constraints on their working hours. It outlines the stringent requirements for maintaining cleanliness, ventilation, lighting, and sanitation and therefore includes the establishment of restrooms, canteens, first aid boxes, facilities for sitting, washing, storing, and drying clothes, and creches for women workers within the factory premises. The appointment of a qualified medical practitioner dictated to address the unique health needs of employees is necessitated. These welfare measures aim to provide women with a favourable and comfortable environment that will tend to their needs in terms of health, hygiene, and childcare.
2. The Maternity Benefit Act, of 1961, mandates that women employees are entitled to paid leave for a period of up to 26 weeks during pregnancy and childbirth and emphasises the provision of nursing breaks. These breaks are designed to allow mothers to attend to the

needs of their infants, promoting breastfeeding and maternal care. This also mandates that employers with 50 or more employees must establish and maintain a creche in the workplace. This is to ensure a convenient and safe space for working mothers to leave their children during working hours. It also includes some provisions for surrogate mothers. It helps women to take time off to care for their infants without being worried about losing their jobs or income. The act supports women so they become an asset to the company, instead of pushing them into leaving their jobs when they are unsupported and become tired due to the burden of responsibilities. A supported mother will be quick to respond to deadlines, projects and work commitments.

3. The Minimum Wages Act, of 1948, ensures that every worker, regardless of gender, receives remuneration commensurate with the nature of their work, skills, and prevailing economic conditions. The act sets a floor wage that employers must adhere to prevent exploitation and guarantee women receive fair remuneration for their work, and it establishes a baseline standard of living for labourers along with preventing exploitation. It will also ensure the fixation and periodic revision of minimum wages for various categories of employment.
4. The Equal Remuneration Act, of 1976, is significant legislation designed to eliminate gender-based wage discrimination. According to this act, employers must pay equal remuneration to their male and female employees who are carrying out the same or similar amount or type of work. It prohibits any kind of discrimination between men and women while recruiting unless there is a restriction under the law to employ women in certain industries. The act promotes fairness, non-discrimination, and equal opportunities for men and women, fostering a more equitable work environment.
5. The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act, 2013, is legislation enacted to address the issue of sexual harassment faced by women in the workplace. One of its key provisions is the mandatory creation of internal complaints committees (ICCs) within organisations. These committees are responsible for addressing complaints related to sexual harassment and ensuring a fair and confidential process for redress. The ICC comprises internal and external members, including a presiding officer, representatives from among employees, and a member from a non-governmental organisation or association committed to women's rights. The act outlines the procedures and time frames for the resolution of complaints, promoting a workplace culture that prioritises the dignity and well-being of women employees. The POSH Act defines sexual harassment to include unwelcome acts such as physical contact and sexual advances, a demand or request for sexual favours, making sexually coloured remarks, showing pornography, and other unwelcome physical, verbal, or non-verbal conduct of a sexual nature. The POSH Act also mandates that the district administration must constitute a Local Complaints Committee (LCC) in each district to focus on cases where the

complaints are lodged against the employer themselves or in cases of units with less than 10 employees where the ICC is not constituted.

6. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) requires that women be given priority in such a way that at least one-third of the beneficiaries shall be women who have registered and requested work. It also has a provision for children accompanying the women working under MGNREGA. The act states that in case the number of children below the age of six years accompanying the women working at any site is five or more, provisions shall be made to depute one of such women workers to look after such children to ensure their safety. It promotes the participation of women by providing weight parity with men. Provision of separate schedules of rates for various women, creche facilities, work-side sheds for children and childcare services. In convergence with the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), women mates have also been introduced, which again facilitates the participation of women in labour. The scheme also endeavours to provide work near the residences of beneficiaries.
7. The Employee State Insurance (ESI) Act, of 1948, extends comprehensive social security benefits to both men and women. It provides them with medical, maternity, disability, unemployment, and insurance benefits. Employees will be provided with a certain percentage of compensation if any of their family members get any severe medical illness, and their salary will not be deducted during the period of their treatment in case of illness. Women employees will be provided with extra leave before and after their delivery. There will be a cash benefit, which ensures that women workers in particular receive support and financial assistance during periods of sickness and maternity. Under this act, registered employees, including women workers and their dependents, are entitled to medical benefits. These benefits cover the cost of medical care, including outpatient and inpatient treatment, maternity care, and related services.
8. The Employees' Provident Funds (EPF) is a piece of legislation in India that provides social security benefits to workers. It ensures the establishment of a provident fund for social and financial security and retirement benefits for all eligible employees, regardless of gender. Under this act, both the employer and employee make contributions to the provident fund, creating a pool of savings. Managed by the Employees' Provident Fund Organization, the funds provide financial security during retirement or unemployment due to certain circumstances. The employers are required to deposit 12% of their employees' salaries every month toward this fund.
9. The Occupational Safety, Health, and Working Conditions Code, 2020, includes provisions aimed at promoting the well-being of women, such as mandatory health checkups. The government may, in the prescribed manner, require an employer to provide adequate safeguards before hiring women for an operation if it determines that hiring women poses a risk to their health and safety in that establishment due to the operation

conducted there. Employers are required to facilitate free-of-cost health checkups on an annual basis for all workers.

10. The Shops and Establishments Act is a state-level law in India that deals with the working conditions and terms of employment and commercial establishments. It covers a myriad of aspects, such as wages, working hours, leaves, and other conditions of service. The act protects the rights of both employers and employees. It addresses some specific needs and concerns of women employees and includes considerations for rest intervals, suitable working conditions, and other safeguards to promote the overall health, safety, and welfare of a woman workers in shops and other commercial establishments.
11. The Code on Social Security, 2020, provides for mandatory creche services in establishments having 50 or more employees, paid maternity leave and adequate safety measures for women working night shifts.
12. The Code on Wages, 2019, mandates no gender-based discrimination for wages in an establishment for similar nature of work.

The Industrial Relations Code, of 2020, includes three main laws that relate to the settlement of people, labour disputes, and collective bargaining agreements, namely the Industrial Disputes Act of 1947, the Trade Unions Act of 1926, and the Industrial Employment Act of 1946. This code introduces the concept of fixed-term employment and sets rules for the retrenchment of workers. The aim is to ensure that women have a meaningful role and participation in resolving individual workplace disputes. The code emphasises fair representation of women in the Grievances Redressal Committee and mandates that representation should be proportionate to the number of women workers to the total workers employed in the establishment.

These provisions collectively aim to establish a safe and secure environment for women. Women, with the help of these measures, gain momentum in their work lives. The government of India has also defined several women quotas in all the major job holdings, positions, and opportunities, which ensures that a certain percentage of jobs are taken by women. In the 2024–25 Interim Budget, the allocations for the Protection and Empowerment for Women schemes have largely remained the same, at ₹3,146 crore.

Schemes by GoI-

Women-led Self-Help Groups (SHGs) exert a positive and statistically significant impact on women's economy and social and political empowerment, which is achieved through trusting women with handling finances, improving social networks, enhancing financial decision-making, and diversifying livelihoods. Women getting the strength to control their finances heightened their self-esteem and reduced social issues. The Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana—National Rural Livelihood Mission (DAY-NRLM), a government SHG program that encompasses approximately 9 crore women through 83 lakh SHGs, has been linked to women's empowerment. In his

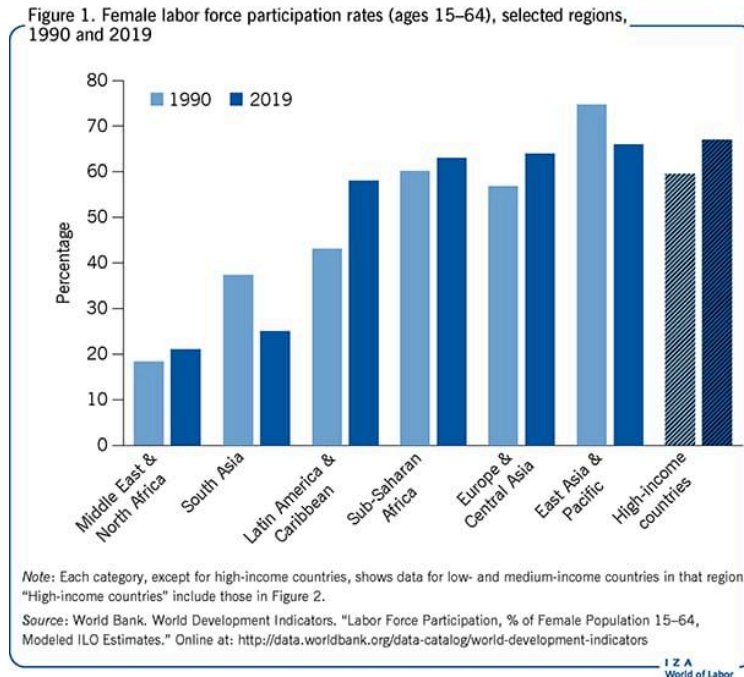
Independence Day speech, Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi stated that the government is working on the SHGs to create 3 crore 'Lakhpati Didis' across India.

PM Mudra Yojana has sanctioned approximately 70% of loans to women entrepreneurs, while 80% of Stand-Up India beneficiaries are women. The success of PM Jan Dhan Yojana has increased the proportion of women with bank accounts that they actively use, rising from 53 per cent in 2015-16 to 78.6% in 2019-21. Advancing the vision of Digital India, over 53% of beneficiaries in the Prime Minister's Rural Digital Literacy Campaign (PMGDISHA) as of July 2023 are women.

The schemes by the government may at times discourage employers from acting for the benefit of workers. For instance, due to the Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan-dhan (PM-SYM) scheme, which provides social security to the unorganised sector workers via pension plan, employers have relaxed their responsibility to provide social security benefits to workers in the unorganised sector. In 2017-18, as per the PLFS (Periodic Labour Force Survey) report, 49.6 percent of total workers: 49% among males and 51.8% among females, were not eligible for any social security benefit, among regular wage employees in the non-agricultural sector. The PM-SYM initiative by the government may have demoralised the employers from providing social security and further employee benefits to the workers.

Women's Labour Force Participation in the World

Despite the increase in India's female labour force participation, our country, India, in comparison with other countries in the world, has very few women in labour. Across the globe, there are a lot of factors that make women feel inferior in comparison to men in terms of opportunities, due to which women are less likely to actively seek work. The women's labour force participation rate is over fifty per cent, compared to eighty per cent of men globally. In the Global Gender Gap Index released by the World Economic Forum in 2021, India stands in the 140th position among the 156 countries. The ranking is based on economic participation and opportunity, health and survival, political empowerment, and educational attainment. In 2019, India's position was 108; in 2012, it became 112, but in 2021, we came 28 ranks down to 140. Over the last three decades, the female labour force participation rate has remained merely the same. That is the reason that today only half a working-age woman participates in the labour force. In 5 of the 7 continents worldwide, more than half of all women ages 15 to 64 participate in the labour market, but in South Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa, only a quarter or less do. Even though the male participation in the labour force is roughly the same for all the regions, that is around 80%. In regions such as North America, the East Asia Pacific, Europe, Central Asia, the Sahara in Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean, more than half of women participate in the labour market and contribute to the economy.



The growth of women's labour in different regions began at different points in time and proceeded at different rates. Nonetheless, there is a substantial increase in the labour force, which is a striking feature of economic and social change in the 20th century. As per the data from the World Bank Gender Data Portal 2022, countries such as Madagascar (83.73), Iceland (71.17), Angola (74.88), South Sudan (70.85), Vietnam (69.1), Tanzania (78.86), and Norway (64.38) have the highest female labour force participation rate, whereas India has 23.97, and Indian women contribute to the economy at 17% of GDP, which is less than half of the global average. Therefore, we are very much lagging in terms of women's employment. If approximately 50% of women join the workforce, India's GDP will reach 9% annually, increasing its growth by 1.5 percentage points. According to the data by the World Bank 2022, the South Asian region had a Female Labour Force Participation Rate of 26%. India's neighbouring countries registered a Female Labour Force Participation Rate of 61% in China, 38% in Bangladesh, 33% in Sri Lanka, 29% in Nepal and 25% in Pakistan, all of which are higher than India's 24% approx.

High levels of FLFP are found in the poorest countries generally, where the agriculture sector is dominant and a major part of the economy. Women's labour is mainly part of agricultural work, which provides them with wages and food. Their participation rate is much lower in countries with low rates of agricultural activities, mainly middle-income countries. However, a shift towards a service sector-based economy and higher education, with low fertility rates among high-income countries, has led to greater rates of women's participation in labour. The gender gap has fallen immensely in Latin America and the Caribbean but is still very striking in South Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa, where men participate in labour three times more than women. India is the most populous country in the world, so its working population being at a lower rate is a

disadvantage we have to conquer. The gap between male and female labour force participation is 57 percentage points in India, according to the World Bank.

Today's women's participation in labour markets is much higher than decades ago in the majority of countries. Women's participation in labour in middle-income countries has changed a lot, and if we look at women's participation in five countries (Korea Rep, Panama, Chile, Portugal, and Spain), which are high-income today but had income levels in 1960 comparable to today's low- and middle-income countries, In Chile, GDP per capita in 1960 was on par with income today in countries such as El Salvador and Indonesia. The trajectory of female labour participation in these five countries from 1960 to today has seen a high rise. In Chile, GDP per capita rose, and female participation increased by 45%. We found that even if in 1960, these countries' GDP was equal to today's low and middle-income countries, women's participation in labour in the low and middle-income countries is higher than in the above-mentioned five in 1960. This shows that the relationship between countries' GDP and female labour participation has changed due to various reasons such as technology, decreasing gender parity, education, changing social norms, and urbanisation.

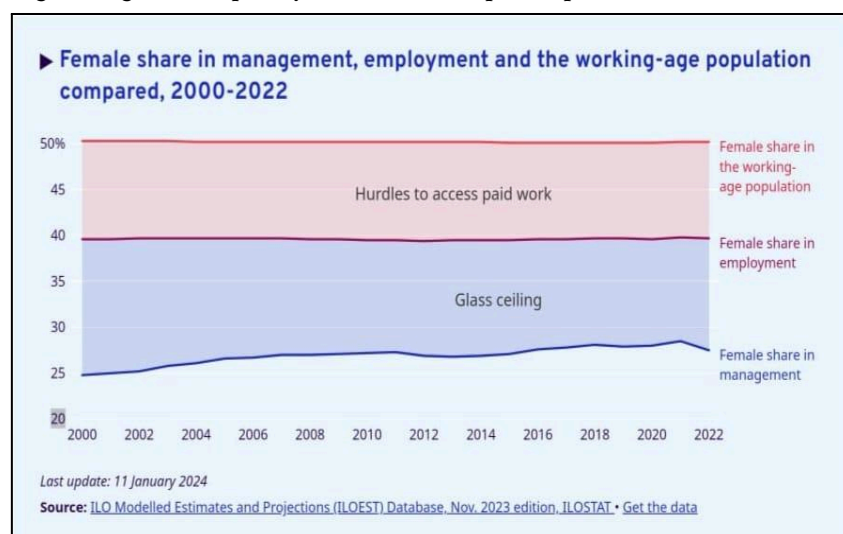
The difference in women's labour participation across countries includes both economic and non-economic factors. Non-economic factors such as political ideologies, differences in cultural expectations, and religions affect labour as a whole. In many religious countries such as Italy, and Spain, and Muslim countries such as Egypt, there is a more patriarchal tradition, and therefore females's participation is lower in these countries. The dominance of men in society and the cultural norms that divide the work for men and women, as breadwinners and caretakers, diminish the rights and strength of women to work. If the allocation of time for women in household work is unequal, it further reduces their chances of working. A large service sector, such as in the US, provides more relief for homemaking and offers much greater opportunities for women's labour force, such as part-time employment or working from home. The U-shaped relationship shows that women's employment activity increases when they participate in agricultural activities, then decreases as manufacturing services start to increase, and finally increases again as women gain education and growth in clerical and technological work.

Policies, taxes, and labour market conditions also play a major role in the matter. The implications of policies that are formed within the countries and the imposition of tax and labour market conditions define the role of the economy in gaining the sights of development. Policies that ensure equal opportunities for women in labour markets, such as anti-discrimination laws, as well as policies that target advancing women's positions at top positions, such as corporate board quotes, influence women's decisions to participate in the labour market.

Lessons India should learn from other countries

Among the OECD countries, the most generous policies are offered by the Nordic countries: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden. They offer paid family leave and safety measures in the working environment.

Iceland, for 12 years, has remained in the first position in the Global Gender Gap Index and had a representation of 5% women in parliament in 1975, which increased to 48% in 2016. It has very high rates of gender equality since it is protected by law. In 1976, Iceland formed the gender equality council and passed the Gender Equality Act, and along with it, after five years in 1980, Iceland became the first nation to elect a woman as president. The Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men has reached the goal of equal rights through all paradigms of society. The act also made it mandatory for companies' boards to include at least 40% women. The country's parliament passed a bill that makes gender wage discrimination illegal, which ensures 'equal pay for equal work' for both men and women. Iceland is known to have the best 'Parental Leave Policy' in the world. The government covers parental leave for birth, adoption and foster care for all employees, including those who are self-employed by paying 80% of earned salary to new parents. The law provides six to nine months of leave, which the parents divide equally amongst themselves to ensure children grow up with equal care and love from both parents. The practice of prostitution, strip clubs and paid sex is illegal in Iceland. This applies to advertising too, which states that no ad must belittle any gender or go against their strict policy of gender equality. India as a very large and diverse economy needs a lot of assistance and planning in reaching these stages of gender equality that Iceland has reached but, following through with Iceland's strict laws will enhance their targets of gender equality and increased participation of women in the labour force.



Recommendations

The women in India have been burdened time and again with societal norms that force them into the title of caregivers; their services are unpaid and usually taken lightly by their family members. To address the low rates of women's participation in the labour force, the following steps can be taken:

1. The unorganised sectors should have local committees under the POSH Act, 2013, Section 2(p), but many workplaces do not have Internal Committees as mentioned, which puts women in a vulnerable position. Few infrastructural changes, due to the awareness campaign, are in the right direction but the flaws lie in the implementation. Lack of proper documentation about the functioning of local committees causes the maximum number of complaints and lack of accountability, therefore needs logistical modifications. A proper budget modification that will ensure changes as per the law will have an overall positive impact. The problem with the POSH Act also lies in the lens through which it is viewed, as it considers the act of sexual harassment at the workplace as the "women's issue" but not the "labour issue". This undermines the main issue which is the hostile and unsafe environment at the workplace and rather implies all its focus on women. The law will have to make sure that the workplaces that for a long time have been dominated by men now have a welcoming and comfortable environment for women. The issue should include the engagement of the Ministry of Women and Child Development (WCD). Changing the perspective and viewing it as a labour issue will be a significant step towards a more inclusive workplace.
2. A large proportion of women are engaged in the agricultural sector at significant advantage as unpaid labourers. While females have the right to own under the Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, very few have it in reality. The women who do own land, rarely have control of the land or the decision-making power of the assets flowing from the land. Men presented in the family replace women whenever agriculture gets mechanised or decisions about changes in farming contracts, experimentation, and cash crop production are taken. There needs to be a transformation in allied activities like dairy, animal husbandry and agro-based processing, removal of gender-based market imperfections along with women getting accessible control over their lands will ensure a transformation of agricultural employment from a low-end to a high-end one and thus accelerate and redistribute growth.
3. Our country has always suffered from the problem of policy targeting. The benefits of the policies a lot of times have not reached the target audience. In the absence of resources to universalise a public policy, the government needs to be careful while targeting so as not to channel the discrimination of the labour market. A recent study proposes that women-oriented market interventions should take into account the agricultural seasonality of their participation. The experiences and interests of women are different than men and need to be discussed in discussions related to policy making and implementation leading to

fairer representation and equal opportunities. There is an inequity in access to land, economic participation, income pay, domestic responsibilities, and access to education and labour, therefore measures are needed to promote an active and visible policy that will mainstream gender perspective and will work towards a more gender-responsive budget.

4. Encouraging female entrepreneurship can be a very dynamic way to boost economic growth, elevate the economic growth of women and distribute the benefits of growth more equitably. In manufacturing, more than 70% of women are self-employed but half of them are unpaid family helpers. Entrepreneurship promotion using public resources needs a fundamental transformation from a set of schemes to an outcome-oriented support which needs to be selective and mainly target opportunity oriented for female entrepreneurs. Central and state governments should converge their schemes to offer fully sustained early-stage incubation and acceleration support. An increased number of women-focused incubators and accelerators is essential to ensure high high-potential female entrepreneurs will create more jobs for other women. The government should also enable convenient and easy last-mile access to all entrepreneurship support schemes. Beneficiaries should have easy end-to-end digital and physical assistance to all the schemes made by the government. The development of more and more service centres around will benefit women in smooth access to these government schemes. The scheme design should include gender-disaggregated data into the outcomes of these schemes to capture trends and reasons for poor regional performance or to gain a better vision towards the issues that are causing less successful females in entrepreneurship.

The Indian government has already taken several major steps towards women's empowerment and participation in labour, but they have to make sure that their policies and schemes are being followed.

Conclusion

In this research paper, we have analysed the current participation of women in the labour force in India. Based on the Annual Periodic Labour Force Survey Report, we found that India has gone through a lot of changes over the years, but in some past years, the participation has been increasing, although it's still very low in comparison to the men. The government has taken several measures to make the working conditions and environment easier and safer for women. Women's participation is higher in the agricultural sector, lower in the secondary sector, and again higher in the tertiary sector. The lower availability of women workers in the manufacturing industry is due to the hazardous conditions that are usually present there. The Indian government has implemented several acts to improve the participation of women in factories that are safe for their work. By taking these measures, we are also making them aware that their empowerment and financial and social strength are matters of concern for the whole country. Although their FLFP rate has been increasing, it's still very low in comparison to other countries. According to World Bank data, India's female labour force participation rate was 19.2% in 2021, contributing 17% of the country's GDP. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) stated that by achieving gender equality, equal participation of men and women in the workforce in India could potentially elevate India's GDP by 27%.

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