



Female Labour Force Participation in India: An Overview of PLFS 2022-23

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Abstract: Women's participation is essential for a nation's progress and overall development. Their involvement in the workforce plays a key role in achieving inclusive and sustainable economic growth. Women hold a significant and indispensable position in society, and their status is often evaluated based on factors such as education, income, employment, health, fertility, and their roles within the family, community, and broader society. In India, economic development has led to notable changes in women's lives, particularly in terms of employment opportunities. According to the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2022-23, the share of women in the workforce increased by 4.2 percentage points to reach 37.0% in 2023. This marks a substantial rise from 22% in 2017-18 to 35.9% in 2022-23, reflecting an overall growth of 13.9 percentage points.

Keywords: Female Labour Force Participation, Inclusive Growth, Sustainable Development, Economic Growth, Employment, PLFS.

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INTRODUCTION

Female labour force participation refers to the proportion of women in a state or country's workforce relative to the total workforce. Women play a vital role in both the global and Indian economies, and their participation is essential for national progress and development. The inclusion and active engagement of women in the labour force contribute significantly to economic growth and integration. The status of women in society is often measured by factors such as income, employment opportunities, education, health, and reproductive capacity. In India, economic development has brought notable changes in women's lives, particularly in terms of employment opportunities. According to the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2022-23, the share of women in the workforce increased by 4.2 percentage points, reaching 37.0% in 2023. Overall, it rose from 22% to

35.9% in 2022-23, marking an increase of 13.9 percentage points.

The Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) employs specific methodologies to estimate workforce participation:

- i. The usual status {PS (principal status) + SS (subsidiary status)} approach
- ii. The current weekly status (CWS) approaches The LFPRs for persons based on usual status (ps+ss) obtained from PLFS (2022-23) are presented at the all-India level for the following age groups:
 - 15-29 years
 - 15 years and above (15-59)
 - all ages

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REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Deogharia (1993) studied women's employment in South Chhotanagpur and found that work status significantly influences their level of involvement. Women in this region were engaged in subsistence activities alongside their household responsibilities. Across all socioeconomic groups, they participated in both subsistence and other income-generating work to support their families. The study also noted migration due to limited employment opportunities.

Lodha (2003) examined how women's employment affects their decision-making power. The research considered cultural factors, structural conditions, and the impacts of economic and social development, as well as science, technology, and modernization. It further explored how women use these technologies and how such usage shapes their decision-making roles.

Dasgupta (1988) observed that Kondh women worked approximately 14 hours a day, compared to 9 hours for men. Even during late pregnancy, women were required to continue physically demanding tasks such as farming or collecting fuel and forest resources. The study highlighted that the decline in minor forest products and foodgrain production did not lessen women's workload.

Nath (2005), in the study "*Status and Empowerment of Women in Tripura*," found that although women's status in Tripura is relatively better than in many other parts of India, progress in empowerment remains gradual. The study analyzed social, economic, and marital conditions to understand the barriers to women's empowerment.

Sikligar (2006) emphasized that women are essential and equal contributors to the economy. The study highlighted that income generated through the Wavli system belongs to women, not men, thereby enhancing their financial independence. It also underscored the importance of institutional support in promoting women's income-generating activities.

Several studies have identified a U-shaped relationship between women's education and labour force participation. This suggests that women with intermediate levels of education are less likely to be employed compared to those with either low or high levels of education (Chatterjee, 2018; Das, 2006). Andrés (2017) argued that this U-shaped pattern partly explains the decline in women's labour force participation rates.

Many researchers have also pointed out that women's labour in India is often underestimated.

Definitions used by NSSO distinguish between contributing family workers (classified as employed) and domestic care workers (considered economically inactive), which can obscure the true extent of women's work. Chatterjee (2015) noted that restrictive definitions of employment and unemployment in the National Sample Survey (NSS) lead to underestimation of female labour force participation.

Additionally, Sanghi (2015) argued that inaccuracies in reporting and measurement arise due to the nature of women's work, which often includes subsistence activities, irregular schedules, and unpaid domestic labour.

Objectives of the study:

- To know the status of female labour force participation in India.
- To identify the determinants of the labour force participation rate of female in India.
- To analyze the reason behind low female labour force participation in India.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study focuses on an in-depth exploration of female labour force participation in India. It relies on secondary data drawn from the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) for the year 2022–2023. The PLFS, conducted by the National Statistical Office (NSO) under the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MOSPI), Government of India, provides a comprehensive and reliable database for analyzing trends, patterns, and determinants of women's participation in the labour market.

Significance of LFPR (Labour Force Participation Rate):

LFPR is an important indicator that helps us understand how actively people—especially women—are engaged in economic activities within a country or region. When the LFPR of women is high, it reflects their greater involvement in the workforce, which has wide-ranging benefits not just for the economy, but for society as a whole.

A higher female LFPR is strongly linked with economic growth. When more women join the workforce, the overall productive capacity of the economy expands, leading to higher output and development. At the household level, women earning an income can significantly reduce poverty and improve the standard of living for their families.

Women's economic participation also has long-term social benefits. Working women are more likely to invest in their children's education and health, creating positive outcomes that carry forward

to future generations. This helps build a healthier and more educated society over time.

Increased participation of women in the workforce can also challenge traditional gender roles and societal norms. As women become more economically independent, it promotes gender equality and empowers them to take on decision-making roles both at home and in society.

There are also demographic and environmental implications. Higher female LFPR is often associated with lower fertility rates, contributing to more sustainable population growth.

This balance supports better resource management and long-term sustainability.

Economic empowerment further strengthens women’s autonomy. When women have their own source of income, they are better equipped to make decisions, negotiate within relationships, and reduce their vulnerability to exploitation or gender-based violence.

Finally, greater inclusion of women in the labour force helps address skill shortages and labour market imbalances. By utilizing the full potential of the population, economies can achieve a more efficient and equitable allocation of resources and talent.

Table 1: Worker Population Ratio (WPR) (in per cent) according to usual status (ps+ss) for each State/UT (Age group: 15 years and above)

State/UT	Persons
Andhra Pradesh	58.6
Arunachal Pradesh	64.9
Assam	54.5
Bihar	47.0
Chhattisgarh	70.1
Delhi	45.8
Goa	45.1
Gujarat	61.5
Haryana	44.9
Himachal Pradesh	73.8
Jharkhand	60.9
Karnataka	55.6
Kerala	50.5
Madhya Pradesh	63.4
Maharashtra	57.6
Manipur	48.7
Meghalaya	65.8
Mizoram	55.2
Nagaland	69.4
Odisha	58.9
Punjab	50.2
Rajasthan	58.8
Sikkim	74.0
Tamil Nadu	54.7
Telangana	57.7
Uttarakhand	53.5
Uttar Pradesh	53.9
West Bengal	56.1
Andaman & N. Island	60.0
Chandigarh	45.6
Dadra & Nagar Haveli & Daman & Diu	65.0
Jammu & Kashmir	60.7
Ladakh	57.0
Lakshadweep	35.5
Puducherry	49.6
All India	56.0

Source: Annual Report PLFS, 2022-23.

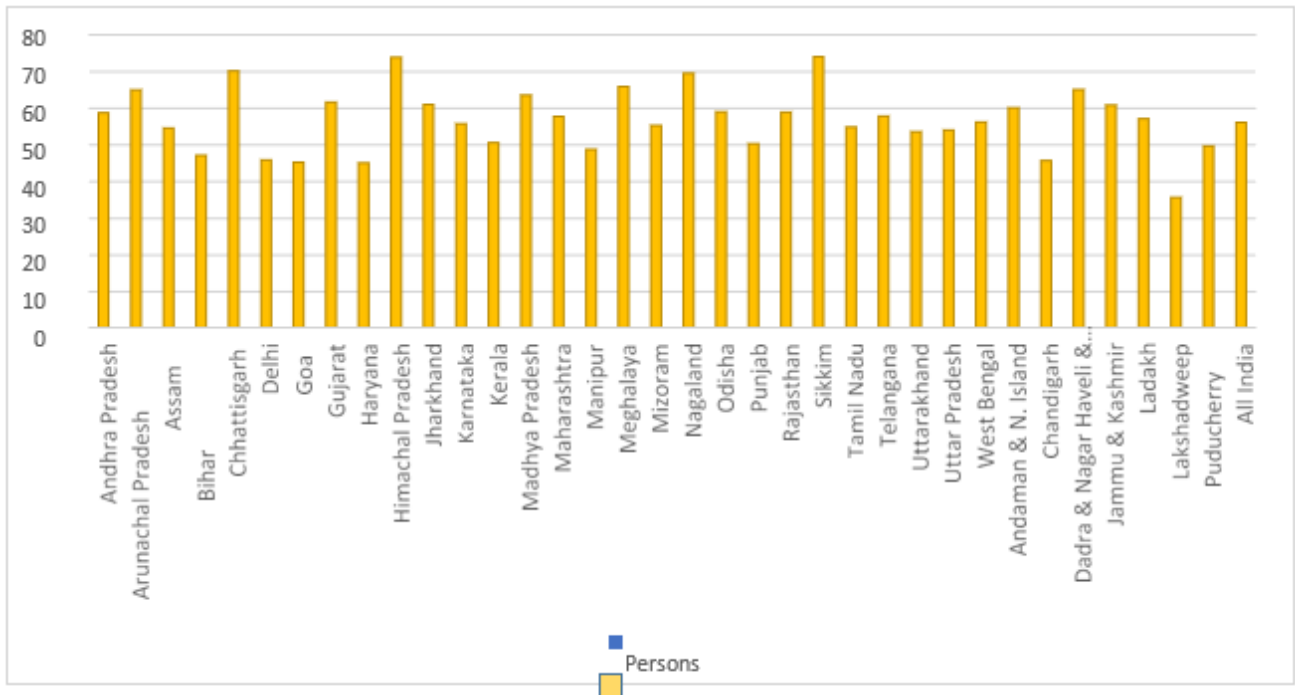


Fig. 1: Worker Population Ratio in India

The Female Labour Force Participation Rate (FLFPR) in India has shown notable improvement in recent years, according to the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2022–23. Overall labour force participation has risen steadily, with urban LFPR increasing from 47.6% to 50.4%, and rural LFPR showing a sharper rise from 50.7% in 2017–18 to 60.8% in 2022–23. Women’s participation has significantly improved, climbing from 23.3% to 37.0% during this period. Similarly, the Worker

Population Ratio (WPR) has increased, from 43.9% to 47.7% in urban areas and from 48.1% to 59.4% in rural areas, with female WPR rising from 22.0% to 35.9%. At the same time, unemployment rates have declined, dropping in rural areas from 5.3% to 2.4% and in urban areas from 7.7% to 5.4%, while female unemployment decreased from 5.6% to 2.9%, indicating overall improvement in employment conditions, especially for women.

Table 2: Female LFPR, WPR and UR in usual status (ps+ss) of age 15 years and above

Category	Rural	Urban	Total
LFPR	41.5	25.4	35.9
WPR	40.7	23.5	37.0
UR	1.8	7.5	2.9

Source: PLFS, annual report 2022-2023

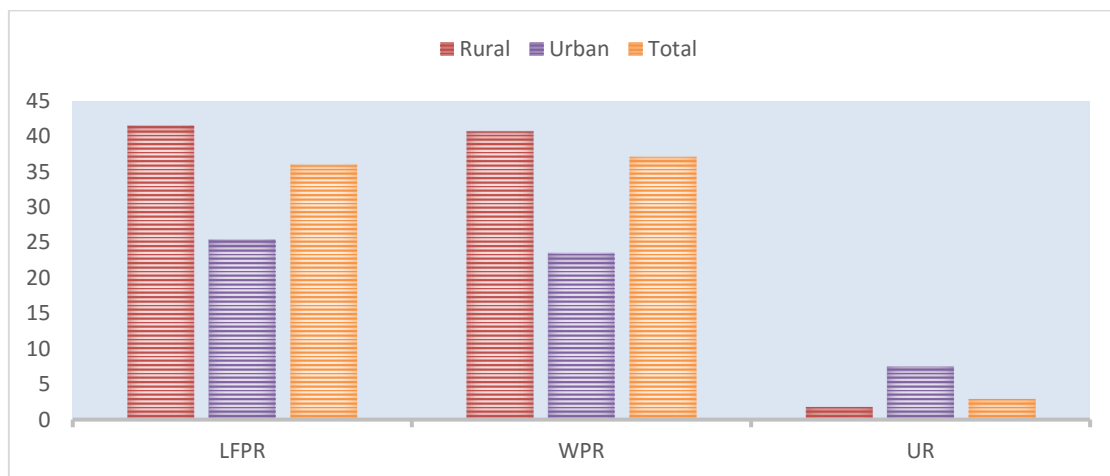


Fig. 2: Female LFPR, WPR and UR in usual status (ps+ss)

Under the Current Weekly Status (CWS) for persons aged 15 years and above, labour market indicators in India show a clear improving trend between 2017–18 and 2022–23. The Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) increased from 47.1% to 49.4% in urban areas and from 48.9% to 56.7% in rural areas, with female participation rising notably from 21.1% to 31.6%. Similarly, the Worker Population Ratio (WPR) improved, growing from

42.6% to 46.0% in urban regions and from 44.8% to 54.2% in rural areas, while women’s WPR increased significantly from 19.2% to 30.0%. At the same time, the Unemployment Rate (UR) declined steadily, dropping from 8.4% to 4.4% in rural areas and from 9.5% to 7.0% in urban areas, with female unemployment also decreasing from 9.0% to 5.1%, reflecting overall strengthening of employment conditions, especially for women.

Table 3: Female LFPR, WPR and UR in current weekly status of age 15 years and above

Category	Rural	Urban	Total
LFPR	34.6	24.0	31.6
WPR	33.2	21.8	25.6
UR	4.0	9.1	5.1

Source: PLFS, annual report 2022-2023.

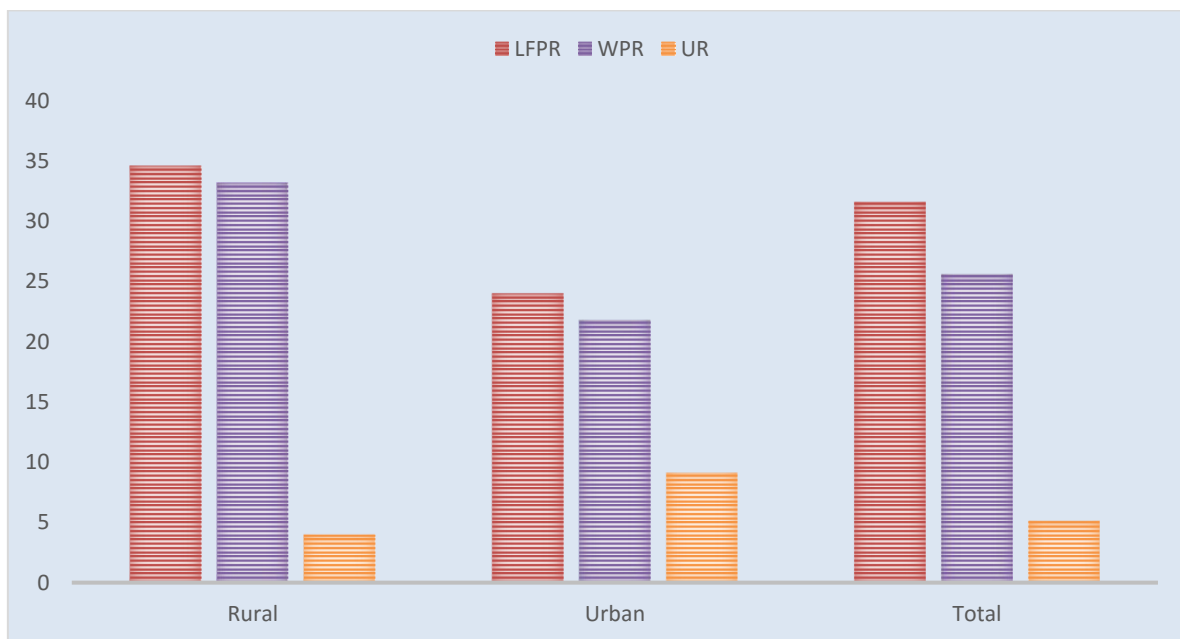


Fig. 3: Female LFPR, WPR and UR in current weekly status

The data about women's labour participation shows that, while it has grown in the near term, their percentage has declined over time. Over the last 20 years, there has been a decline in female labour force participation (LFP), which is indicative of a general decline in labour market activity. According to the statistics, the percentage of Indian women who are actively employed dropped from 28% in 1990 to 24%

in 2022. The female labour force participation rate (LFPR) in India is obviously rising, according to the most recent Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) report for the years 2021– 2022. For women in the country who are 15 years of age or older, the projected labour force participation rate was 30.0% in 2019–20 and would rise to 32.8% in 2021–2022.

Table 4: LFPR of India according to usual status (ps+ss) and CWS of all ages

LFPR (2022-2023), in %.						
Category	RURAL		URBAN		TOTAL	
	Usual Status	CWS	Usual Status	CWS	Usual Status	CWS
Male	55.5	54.5	58.3	57.9	56.2	55.4
Female	30.5	25.4	20.2	19.1	27.8	23.7
Total	43.4	40.4	39.8	39.0	42.4	40.0

Source: PLFS, report, 2022-2023.

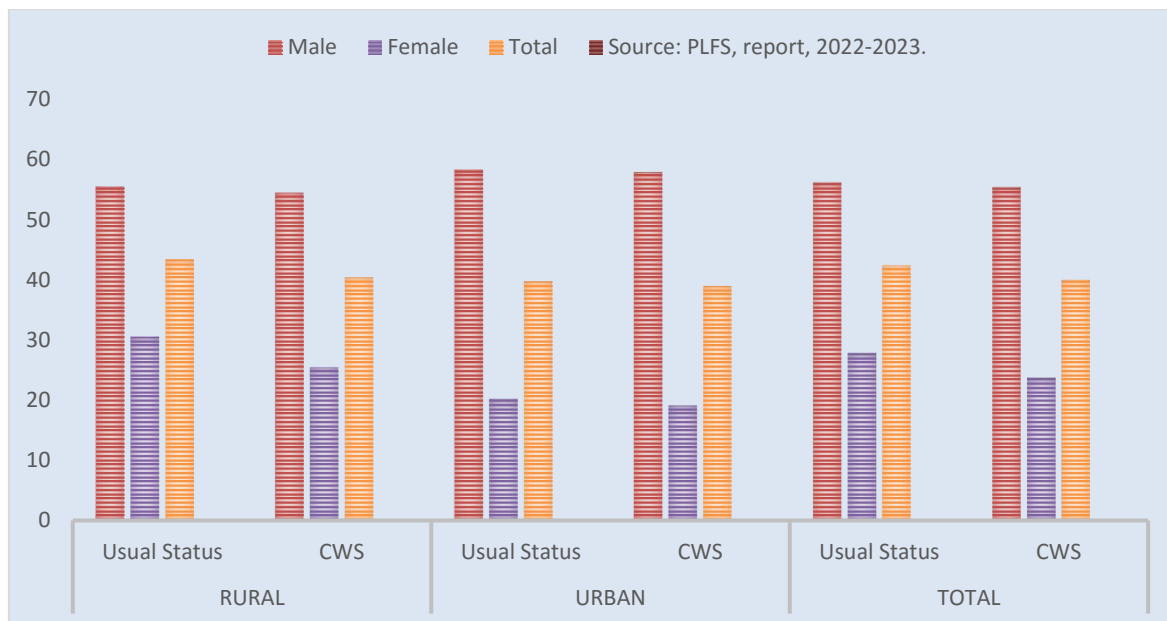


Fig. 4: LFPR of India according to usual status (ps+ss) and CWS, 2022-23 (in %)

Factors Responsible for Low Female Labour Force Participation in India:

- **Society & Social Norms:** Traditional norms like the *female homemaker* and *male breadwinner* roles limit women’s work participation; about 3.4% of women are excluded due to sociocultural factors.
- **Time Poverty:** Around 49% of women are engaged in unpaid domestic work (childcare, sewing, household chores), leaving little time for paid employment.
- **Gender Bias & Restrictions:** Cultural expectations, workplace rules (e.g., limits on night shifts), and acceptance of inequality (as noted by UNDP) hinder women’s employment opportunities.
- **Caste Factor:** Women from lower-caste households have higher participation in informal work due to economic need and historical occupational patterns.
- **Wage Disparity:** Significant gender pay gap—self-employed men earn 2.8 times more; salaried men earn 24% more; casual workers earn 48% more than women.
- **Education Levels:** Higher education improves women’s employment chances; historically advantaged groups have better access to opportunities.
- **Impact of Pandemic:** Globally, about 64 million women lost jobs (double men), as women are more concentrated in informal and unstable employment sectors.

Table 5: LFPR and Education wise LFPR, 2022-23

Education Level	Percentage (%)
Not Literate	56.70%
Primary	65.40%
Middle	59.60%
Secondary	48.90%
Higher Secondary	46.60%
Diploma	79.20%
Graduates	64.50%
Post Graduates	70.60%
All	57.90%

Source: PLFS, annual report 2022-2023

Women have a vital role in influencing the social, cultural, economic, and religious dimensions of society. They are also regarded as significant economic contributors in society. Nevertheless, they persistently lag behind in several domains of life, including education, employment, wellbeing, and economic empowerment. Empowering may be

described as the act of enabling someone to obtain and have control over authority and resources. To facilitate women's ability to make autonomous decisions, it is necessary for both the government and non- government organizations to formulate suitable policies and activities aimed at fostering the economic empowerment of women.

The status of women in a culture is a significant determinant of the level of social fairness in that group. Women's status is often evaluated by considering their earnings, employment, educational attainment, health, fertility, and their roles in the family, community, and society. Women have a crucial and essential role in communities. Women have a crucial part in many agricultural activities and contribute significantly to the sustainable growth of agriculture. In order to attain equitable agricultural development and enhance the agency of women, it is vital to possess a holistic comprehension of their engagement in work, gender-related challenges, labouriousness, as well as their health and nutritional condition. The concept of women's involvement in the labour force in the agricultural sector is extensive and complex. Facilitating the advancement of women in the agricultural sector is an essential component of attaining comprehensive development. India's underwhelming performance in boosting women's empowerment and attaining gender equality is seen in several indicators. The sex ratio in different parts of the country is 940 females per 1000 males. India ranks 135th out of 187 countries on the Gender Inequality Index, as stated in the 2014 Global Human Development Report. Women from underprivileged populations, including Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and minority groups, face discrimination, exploitation, and limited employment opportunities.

CONCLUSION

Women make up about 48.23% of India's population, but only 35.9% of them are part of the workforce (PLFS 2022-23). The male Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) increased from 75.1% in 2017-18 to 77.4% in 2022-23, while the female LFPR rose from 21.1% to 31.6% during the same period. In many cases, women do more physical work than men in agriculture and forests, yet they often have lower literacy levels, poor nutrition, and weaker health conditions. Earlier estimates (1993-94) also showed high poverty levels, with 51.92% of the rural population and 41.4% of the urban population living in poverty.

Although constitutional provisions have improved women's status, they still face many challenges. Women contribute significantly to their family income and are often more dedicated, but they

have fewer job opportunities and lower awareness due to limited education. Overall, women continue to have lower social and economic status than men in terms of income, education, jobs, and well-being.

According to the McKinsey Global Institute, achieving gender equality could increase India's GDP by about \$770 billion by 2025. Greater participation of women in the workforce not only improves their social status and empowerment but also supports important development goals like gender equality (SDG 5), decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), and reduced inequalities (SDG 10). With a large young population, India has a strong opportunity to boost its economic growth by increasing women's participation in the workforce.

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