



WOMEN'S LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATE - GS III MAINS

Q. India is one among the few developing countries to have the lower female labour participation rate. Examine its causes and elaborate the steps taken by the government to enhance women employment rate. (15 marks, 250 words)

News: *Unemployment rate declines to 6.5% in Q3FY24; female labour force participation rises to 25%: MoSPI*

What's in the news?

- Recently released quarterly Periodic Labour Force Survey said that urban unemployment rate declined to its lowest level in over four years of 6.5% in October-December 2023, while the female labor force participation rate rose to its highest level of 25%.

Key takeaways:

- The share of women in the agriculture sector declined, and in the secondary and tertiary sectors improved in the third quarter of FY24, whereas men recorded a declining share in secondary sector employment.

Female Labour Force Participation Rate (FLFPR):

- Female Labour Force Participation Rate is a ratio of the number of women who are part of the labour force to the number of women in the working age (greater than 15 years of age).
- A woman is considered to be a part of the labour force if she/he is either employed or actively looking for work.

Causes of Lower Women Labour Force Participation Rate:

1. High Degree of Informalisation:

- According to a 2018 study by the International Labour Organisation (ILO), more than 95% of India's working women are informal workers.
- The absence of social security net in the informal sector discourages women from participating in the labour force.

2. Missing Manufacturing Sector:

- Lack of alternative employment opportunities in manufacturing and the limited number of jobs in services for women, has also suppressed FLFPR in India.

3. Gender Pay Gap and Glass Ceiling:

- According to the Economic Survey 2018, India has one of the largest gender gap in median earnings of full-time employees. Such discriminatory practices at workplace adversely affect FLFPR.



4. Pink Jobs:

- The societal notions about 'gendered occupations' limit the role of women to specific job profiles like nursing, teaching, gynecologist etc.
- There are tangible and intangible barriers to entry of women in multiple professions like heavy engineering, law enforcement, armed forces etc.

5. Cultural Practices:

- Unpaid care, child care and domestic chores, has hindered women's ability to participate in the labour force.
- In a patriarchal society, many women are not allowed to work after marriage.

6. Increase in Household Income:

- The rise in household incomes in both the rural and urban areas has provided women the choice to not take up jobs.

7. Safety Concerns:

- High incidents of violence against women discourage women from working at night like their male counterparts.
- Further, instances of sexual harassment at workplace induces women to opt out of labour force.

Measures taken by the Government:

- **The Mission Shakti**, includes the components such as;
 - National, State and District level Hubs for Empowerment of Women.
 - Women Hiplines, One Stop Centres.
 - Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Sakhi Niwas (Working Women's Hostels).
 - Palna (crèches for children of working women) etc.
- **The schemes of One Stop Centres and Universalization of Women Helpline** are implemented by the Ministry of Women and Child Development to support women facing violence or distress of any kind which may adversely affect their participation in the workforce.
- **Working Women Hostels** for ensuring safe accommodation for women working away from their place of residence.
- **National Crèche Scheme** to provide daycares' facilities to children of the age group of 6 months to 6 years of working women who are employed.
- The Government, with the aim to provide safe and secure work environment to women at their workplace and to increase their participation in the workforce, has also enacted 'the **Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013**' (SH Act).
 - The Act covers all women, irrespective of their age or employment status and protect them from sexual harassment at all workplaces whether public or private, organized or unorganized.



- In order to enhance the employability of female workers and ensure economic independence of women through skill development and vocational training, the Government has also introduced **Skill India Mission** under which training is provided through a network of women Industrial Training institutes, National Vocational Training Institutes and Regional Vocational Training Institutes.
- The **National Skill Development Policy** focuses on inclusive skill development, with the objective of increased women participation for better economic productivity.
- There are schemes like **Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana and Stand-up India**, for helping the women to set up their own enterprises.
- The **Labour Codes**, viz. The Code on Wages 2019, the Industrial Relations Code, 2020, Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020 and the Code on Social Security, 2020, collectively include provisions to promote participation of women in the workforce in a dignified manner and with adequate safety measures adopted by the employers.

WAY FORWARD:

1. Family Responsibility and Career:

- Women, especially in low-income communities in India, have a composite view of their lives (jobs, enterprises, care work, upholding traditions, and community connections) and navigate through these with their household and extended family.

2. Comprehensive View of Life:

- The non-compartmentalisation emerges from a culturally embedded and empirically grounded perspective that does not view culture as a limitation, but as a resource and enabler that provides a comprehensive valuation for all kinds of work that women do (informal and formal).

3. Understanding the Cultural Context:

- This translates into everyday negotiations that have less to do with upturning the current social structure and more with negotiating for increased autonomy within the cultural context.

4. Flexible Working Hours:

- Policy solutions must derive from the negotiations women are interested in undertaking with their employers around home-based work or flexible working hours.

It is important to perceive women's employment goals as reflective of preferences defined not only by their gender but also by their social and cultural context.