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1447 / C, 3rd Floor, 15th Main Road, H Block, Anna Nagar West, Chennai - 600040.

+91 9445132221
+91 9445032221
044 4232 3192

www.plrajiasacademy.com
info@plrajiasacademy.com

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1. 'Women and Men in India 2025'

The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation released the 27th edition of "Women and Men in India 2025 - Selected Indicators and Data" providing comprehensive statistical overview of gender-related conditions.

1.Background

Gender inequality in India has deep historical roots spanning millennia, manifesting through patriarchal social structures, discriminatory customary practices, unequal resource access, and systemic barriers limiting women's opportunities across education, employment, health, and decision-making. Post-independence, the Constitution enshrined gender equality through fundamental rights and directive principles, yet translating constitutional guarantees into lived reality required sustained policy interventions, legal reforms, and social transformation. Early decades witnessed slow progress constrained by entrenched social norms, limited female education, early marriages, high maternal mortality, and near-total exclusion from formal employment and political representation. The liberalization era beginning 1991 accelerated some improvements—female literacy rose, sex ratios improved marginally, and urban middle-class women accessed expanded opportunities. However, progress remained uneven with rural-urban divides, interstate variations, and intersectional disadvantages based on caste, class, and religion creating vast disparities in women's conditions.
The 'Women and Men in India 2025' report released by the Ministry of Statistics represents the 27th edition of this publication series tracking gender indicators since 1998, providing longitudinal data enabling assessment of policy impacts and identification of persistent gaps. The 2025 edition covering recent years reveals significant achievements including improved sex ratios at birth, declining infant mortality for both genders, gender parity across school education levels, dramatically increased female Labor Force Participation Rate particularly in rural areas, and growing women's representation in managerial positions. These improvements reflect policy impacts including Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana, Mission Shakti, and numerous educational, health, and economic empowerment schemes targeting gender gaps demonstrating that sustained governmental

commitment combined with social awareness can transform gender outcomes even in deeply patriarchal societies.

2.About the 'Women and Men in India 2025' Report

Publication Overview

1. The report provides comprehensive statistical overview of gender-related conditions in India using official data from multiple ministries and government agencies.
2. It represents the 27th edition of this publication series, indicating nearly three decades of systematic gender data tracking since 1998.
3. The publication serves as authoritative reference for policymakers, researchers, civil society, and international organizations monitoring India's gender progress.

Data Coverage and Structure

1. The report brings together gender-disaggregated data across major areas including population demographics, education access and outcomes, health indicators, economic participation, decision-making representation, and violence against women.
2. It includes 50 key indicators with detailed metadata explaining definitions, data sources, collection methodologies, and limitations.
3. This transparency improves understanding, enables informed interpretation, and allows users to assess data quality and comparability.

Analytical Framework

1. The report presents data across rural-urban divisions, States and Union Territories, and over time enabling comparison and tracking of trends.
2. Geographic disaggregation reveals spatial inequalities requiring targeted interventions in lagging regions.
3. Temporal tracking shows progress trajectories, policy impacts, and emerging challenges requiring course corrections.

3.Key Highlights - Demographic and Health Indicators

Sex Ratio Improvement

1. The sex ratio at birth has increased at the all-India level from 904 in 2017-19 to 917 in 2021-23.
2. This improvement indicates enhanced survival of female children, reflecting declining sex-selective abortion and improved care for girl children.
3. However, 917 still falls short of the biologically normal sex ratio of approximately 952, indicating persistent son preference.
4. States like Haryana and Punjab continue showing severely skewed sex ratios despite improvements, requiring sustained interventions.

Infant Mortality Decline

1. Infant mortality rates for both female and male infants have recorded pronounced and sustained decline between 2008 and 2023.
2. Female infant mortality declined from 55 per 1,000 live births in 2008 to approximately 27 in 2023.
3. Male infant mortality declined from 52 per 1,000 live births in 2008 to approximately 26 in 2023.
4. The convergence between male and female rates indicates reduced gender discrimination in infant care and health-seeking.
5. Overall decline reflects improved maternal health services, institutional deliveries, immunization coverage, and paediatric care access.

4.Key Highlights - Education Indicators

Gender Parity in School Education

1. Gender parity has been achieved across all levels of school education from Primary to Higher Secondary level.
2. The Gender Parity Index—ratio of female to male enrolment—has reached approximately 1.0 at all school levels.
3. This represents historic achievement considering traditional barriers preventing girls' education including early marriage, domestic responsibilities, safety concerns, and son preference in educational investment.

Higher Education Progress

1. Gross Enrolment Ratio at Higher Education improved from 28.5 to 30.2 for females between 2021-22 and 2022-23.
2. Male GER increased marginally from 28.3 to 28.9 during the same period.
3. Female GER now exceeds male GER, indicating girls' educational aspirations and parental willingness to invest in daughters' higher education.
4. This reversal from historical patterns where males dominated higher education represents significant social transformation.

5.Key Highlights - Labour Force Participation

Overall LFPR Increase

1. Labour Force Participation Rate for ages 15 and above has increased for both men and women.
2. LFPR measures the proportion of working-age population either employed or actively seeking employment.
3. Rising LFPR indicates expanded economic participation, improved job opportunities, and changing social attitudes toward work.

Rural Female Participation Surge

1. Rural females witnessed the highest increase in LFPR, surging from 37.5% in 2022 to 45.9% in 2025.
2. This dramatic increase reflects multiple factors including expanded rural employment schemes like MGNREGS, self-help group proliferation, agricultural mechanization freeing women's time, and changing attitudes toward women's work.
3. Rural women's increased economic participation enhances household incomes, improves women's status, and provides economic autonomy.

Urban-Rural Patterns

1. While rural female LFPR increased dramatically, urban female participation remains lower reflecting different economic structures and social attitudes.
2. Urban areas offer more formal sector jobs requiring specific skills and education, creating barriers for less-educated women.
3. Urban middle-class families often discourage women's employment due to status considerations and caregiving expectations.

Key Highlights - Leadership and Representation

Managerial Position Growth

1. Men engaged in managerial positions increased by 73.80% between 2017 and 2025.
2. Women engaged in managerial positions increased by 102.54% during the same period.
3. Women's faster growth rate indicates breaking of glass ceilings and expanding leadership opportunities.
4. However, absolute numbers likely remain heavily male-dominated despite women's faster proportional growth.

Sectoral Representation

1. Women's representation in corporate boards, senior government positions, and entrepreneurship has improved.
2. Political representation through reservation in Panchayati Raj Institutions created approximately 1.3 million elected women representatives.
3. However, parliamentary and state assembly representation remains low without constitutionally mandated reservations.

6.Major Government Initiatives for Women's Empowerment

Constitutional and Legal Framework

1. The Indian Constitution guarantees gender equality through Preamble provisions, Fundamental Rights, and Directive Principles of State Policy.
2. Article 14 ensures equality before law prohibiting discrimination.
3. Article 15 specifically prohibits discrimination based on sex.

4. Article 51(a)(e) creates constitutional duty to renounce practices derogatory to women's dignity.
5. Directive Principles in Articles 39 and 42 emphasize equal livelihood opportunities, equal pay for equal work, and maternity relief.

Nutrition and Health Programs

1. Poshan Abhiyaan launched in 2018 aims to improve nutrition for children, adolescent girls, pregnant women, and lactating mothers.
2. The program addresses malnutrition reducing stunting, wasting, and anaemia through convergent action.
3. Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana provides financial compensation for wage loss due to pregnancy and childbirth.
4. The scheme was extended to cover the second child if the child is a girl, promoting gender equality.
5. Mission Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0 improve nutrition, health, and immunity through upgraded Anganwadi centres.

Girl Child Protection

1. Beti Bachao Beti Padhao launched on January 22, 2015, aims to prevent gender-biased sex-selective elimination.
2. The scheme ensures survival and protection of girl children while promoting their education.
3. Multi-sectoral interventions address sex ratio imbalances, discriminatory practices, and educational barriers.

Education Initiatives

1. Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas are residential schools for girls from socio-economically disadvantaged groups in educationally backward areas.
2. These schools provide safe education from classes VI to XII, supporting girls' transition to higher secondary schooling.
3. Vigyan Jyoti run by the Department of Science & Technology encourages meritorious girls, especially in rural areas, to pursue STEM careers.
4. The program addresses gender gaps in science and technology through mentoring, counselling, laboratory exposure, and role model interactions.

Skill Development

1. Nurturing Aspirations through Vocational Training for Young Adolescent Girls (NAVYA) launched in 2025 provides skill development for adolescent girls aged 16-18 years who have passed Class 10.
2. Skill India Digital Hub offers unified platform integrating skilling, training, and employment services.

Comprehensive Empowerment

1. Mission Shakti launched by the Ministry of Women and Child Development ensures safety, security, and empowerment through two components.
2. Sambal focuses on safety and security through legal support, helplines, and protection mechanisms.
3. Samarthya promotes empowerment through economic opportunities, skill development, and leadership training.

7.Persistent Challenges

Violence Against Women

1. Despite improvements across indicators, violence against women including domestic violence, sexual assault, harassment, and trafficking remains widespread.
2. Reporting rates remain low due to stigma, fear of retaliation, lack of faith in justice systems, and social pressure.
3. Conviction rates in rape and domestic violence cases remain abysmally low, creating impunity.

Economic Inequality

1. Gender wage gaps persist with women earning substantially less than men for comparable work.
2. Women's overrepresentation in informal sector employment denies social security, job security, and legal protections.
3. Unpaid domestic and care work remains almost entirely women's burden, limiting economic participation.

Political Representation

1. Women's representation in Parliament and state assemblies remains around 10-15%, far below the 33% reservation proposed in pending legislation.
2. Without constitutionally mandated political reservation, women's legislative representation lags dramatically.

Intersectional Disadvantages

1. Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe, and minority women face compounded disadvantages from caste, religious, and gender discrimination.
2. Rural, poor, and less-educated women experience worse outcomes across all indicators compared to urban, affluent, educated women.

8.Way Forward

Strengthen Implementation

1. Translate legal rights and policy frameworks into ground-level implementation through adequate budgets, trained personnel, monitoring systems, and accountability mechanisms, while addressing last-mile delivery gaps preventing scheme benefits from reaching intended beneficiaries, particularly in remote and marginalized communities.

Address Violence Comprehensively

1. Implement comprehensive violence prevention including legal reforms ensuring swift justice, police and judicial training on gender sensitivity, widespread awareness campaigns challenging patriarchal attitudes, and accessible support services including shelters, counselling, and legal aid for survivors.

Expand Economic Opportunities

1. Create quality employment opportunities for women through skill development aligned with market demands, workplace safety regulations including harassment prevention, childcare infrastructure enabling women's workforce participation, and equal pay enforcement closing gender wage gaps across sectors.

Enhance Political Participation

1. Pass pending Women's Reservation Bill providing 33% reservation in Parliament and state assemblies, while strengthening women's participation in local governance through training, mentorship, and support systems enabling effective leadership rather than proxy representation by male relatives.

Challenge Social Norms

1. Address root causes of gender inequality through educational curricula promoting gender equality, media campaigns challenging stereotypes, community engagement transforming discriminatory practices, and male involvement in domestic and care responsibilities creating more equitable household divisions of labor.

Conclusion

The 'Women and Men in India 2025' report reveals significant gender progress with sex ratios improving from 904 to 917, infant mortality declining dramatically for both genders, gender parity achieved across school education, female higher education GER exceeding males at 30.2, and rural female LFPR surging from 37.5% to 45.9%. Women in managerial positions increased by 102.54% compared to 73.80% for men. These improvements reflect policy impacts from Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Poshan Abhiyaan, Mission Shakti, and educational initiatives. Despite progress, persistent challenges including violence, economic inequality, and political underrepresentation require sustained commitment.

Source - https -//www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2256593&reg=3&lang=1

2. ILO Report

1. Why in News

1. International Labour Organization (ILO) report calls for lifelong learning as central policy pillar
2. Rapid technological and structural labour market changes driving need
3. Widening "learning divide" between formal and informal sectors
4. Only 16% of people aged 15-64 participated in structured training in past year
5. 51% of formal sector permanent workers received employer-provided training
6. Inequalities in learning opportunities affecting informal workers, women, low-income groups

2. What is Lifelong Learning?

Definition

1. Continuous acquisition of knowledge, skills, competencies throughout individual's life
2. Cradle-to-grave learning approach
3. Learning beyond traditional school years

Components

Formal education and vocational training -

1. Structured programs with certifications
2. Universities, technical institutes, skill centers

Informal learning -

1. Work experience and on-the-job learning
2. Digital platforms (MOOCs, online courses)
3. Peer learning, mentorship
4. Self-directed learning

Continuous reskilling and upskilling -

1. Adapting to changing labour market demands
2. Learning new technologies and methods
3. Career transitions and advancement

3. Key Findings of ILO Report

Inequalities in Learning Opportunities

Disadvantaged groups with significantly lower access -

1. Informal workers - Lack employer support, institutional access
2. Low-income groups - Financial barriers to training
3. Women - Care responsibilities, social norms limiting participation
4. Less-educated individuals - Lower awareness, foundational skill gaps

Widening "learning divide" -

1. Between formal and informal sectors
2. Urban-rural disparities
3. Skilled-unskilled worker gap
4. Perpetuates inequality cycles

Overemphasis on Formal Education

1. Existing policies focus excessively on initial formal education (school, college)
2. Neglect continuous skill development throughout working life
3. Front-loading of education inadequate in rapidly changing world
4. Assumption that initial education sufficient for lifetime career
5. Need for paradigm shift toward continuous learning model

Access Gap Statistics

1. Only 16% of people aged 15-64 participated in structured training during 12 months preceding survey
2. Massive 84% not accessing formal training opportunities
3. 51% of full-time permanent workers in formal sector firms received employer-provided training
4. Sharp contrast - Formal vs informal sector access
5. Informal workers largely excluded from structured learning

4. Why is Lifelong Learning Becoming Important?

Technological Transformation

1. Rapid digitalization transforming all sectors
2. Artificial Intelligence (AI) spread reshaping occupations
3. Automation replacing -
    1. Repetitive tasks
    2. Low-skill routine jobs
    3. Administrative work
4. Increasing demand for -
    1. Advanced cognitive skills (problem-solving, critical thinking)
    2. Digital skills (programming, data analysis, cybersecurity)
    3. Human-centric skills (creativity, emotional intelligence, collaboration)
5. Technology evolution faster than educational system adaptation

Green Transition

Shift towards -

1. Renewable energy (solar, wind, hydrogen)
2. Sustainable industries (circular economy, green manufacturing)

3. Climate-resilient economies

Generating new employment sectors -

4. Green jobs in renewable energy installation, maintenance
5. Environmental management and conservation
6. Sustainable agriculture and forestry
7. Green building and construction

Workers require new skills -

8. Technical skills for green technologies
9. Environmental knowledge and sustainability principles
10. Adaptation skills for climate-resilient practices

Demographic Changes

Aging populations in developed countries -

1. Extended working lives
2. Need to keep older workers employable and productive
3. Prevent skill obsolescence among senior workers
4. Age-friendly learning methods

Youth-heavy populations in developing nations (like India) -

1. Demographic dividend opportunity
2. Need to meet evolving industry needs
3. First-time skill acquisition and career entry
4. Leapfrogging to modern skills

Changing Nature of Work

Gig economy growth -

1. Freelance, contract, temporary work
2. Multiple career transitions
3. Self-employment requiring diverse skills

Remote work normalization -

1. Digital collaboration tools
2. Self-management capabilities
3. Technology proficiency

Platform-based employment -

1. App-based services (Uber, Swiggy, Urban Company)
2. Algorithm-driven work allocation
3. Rating systems requiring customer service excellence

Workers must continuously upgrade competencies to remain competitive

Additional Factors

1. Globalization and international competition
2. Increased job mobility and career changes
3. Longer working lives due to higher life expectancy
4. Knowledge economy requiring constant learning
5. Industry 4.0 (IoT, blockchain, 3D printing, etc.)

5. Key Government Initiatives in India

Skill India Mission

1. Launched - 2015
2. Objective - Train millions of youths in industry-relevant skills
3. Focus - Improving employability, bridging skill gap
4. Umbrella mission integrating multiple skill programs
5. Public-private partnerships for training delivery
6. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) component

Jan Shikshan Sansthan (JSS)

1. **Target groups -**
    1. Non-literates
    2. Neo-literates (recently literate)
    3. School dropouts
2. **Focus -** Rural areas, women, marginalized communities
3. Vocational training at low or no cost
4. Community-based training centers
5. Livelihood-oriented skill development

National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (NAPS)

1. Promotes apprenticeship through financial support
2. Offers stipend support to employers for apprentices
3. Training includes -
    1. Basic training (theoretical knowledge)
    2. On-the-job/practical training in industries
4. Dual training model (classroom + workplace)
5. Connects youth with industry
6. National Apprenticeship Training Scheme (NATS) framework

Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY)

1. Flagship skill certification scheme under Skill India Mission
2. Enhance employability among youth
3. Components -
    1. Short-term training - Industry-relevant courses (150-300 hours)
    2. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) - Certify existing skills
    3. Special projects - Customized for specific needs
4. Assessment and certification through sector skill councils
5. Monetary rewards for certified candidates
6. Currently in PMKVY 4.0 phase

National Education Policy (NEP) 2020

1. Recommended - Integration of vocational education into mainstream education
2. All educational institutions to offer vocational courses
3. Multiple entry-exit options with credit accumulation
4. Emphasis on experiential learning
5. National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF) alignment
6. Vocational education from Grade 6 onwards

Other Initiatives

Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Kendras (PMKKs) - Model skill training centers

Sector Skill Councils - Industry-led bodies setting standards

National Council for Vocational Education and Training (NCVET) - Regulatory body

Digital platforms - DIKSHA, SWAYAM for online learning

Startup India, Atal Innovation Mission - Entrepreneurship and innovation skills

6. Challenges in Implementing Lifelong Learning

Digital Divide

1. Unequal access to -
    1. Internet connectivity (rural-urban gap)
    2. Digital infrastructure (devices, bandwidth)
    3. Electricity and charging facilities
2. Limits participation in online learning
3. Excludes large population from digital skilling
4. Affordability of devices and data
5. Digital literacy gaps

Informal Workforce

1. In India, ~90% workforce in informal sector

2. Lacks institutional support for training and reskilling
3. No employer-provided training
4. Fragmented, unorganized nature
5. Difficulty in reaching and mobilizing
6. Low awareness of skill programs
7. Time and income constraints (cannot afford training periods)

Financial Constraints

1. High training costs (fees, materials, opportunity cost of time)
2. Discourage participation among vulnerable populations
3. Insufficient public funding for universal access
4. Limited scholarship/subsidy schemes
5. Indirect costs (travel, accommodation, childcare)
6. Lack of financing options for skill loans

Institutional Fragmentation

1. Lack of coordination between -
    1. Multiple government departments (Education, Skill Development, Labour, Industry)
    2. Educational institutions (ITIs, polytechnics, universities)
    3. Industries and employers
2. Weakens skill ecosystems
3. Duplication of efforts
4. Inconsistent standards and certifications
5. Poor labor market information systems

Rapid Skill Obsolescence

1. Technological change making existing skills outdated faster
2. Half-life of skills decreasing
3. Training content becoming obsolete before completion
4. Need for constant curriculum updates
5. Industries evolving faster than training systems can adapt

Additional Challenges

1. Quality assurance in training delivery
2. Social stigma around vocational education
3. Mismatch between training supply and industry demand
4. Limited employer engagement in training
5. Inadequate trainer capacity and quality

6. Weak monitoring and evaluation systems
7. Recognition and portability of credentials across geographies

7. ILO Recommendations

Inclusive Learning Systems

1. Ensure affordable and accessible training for -
    1. Women (flexible schedules, childcare support, safety)
    2. Informal workers (proximity, timing, relevant content)
    3. Rural populations (local centers, mobile units)
    4. Vulnerable groups (persons with disabilities, migrants, minorities)
2. Remove financial, geographical, social barriers
3. Affirmative measures for disadvantaged groups
4. Universal entitlement to training

Strengthen Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)

1. Collaboration between -
    1. Governments (policy, funding, regulation)
    2. Industries (needs identification, apprenticeships, job placements)
    3. Educational institutions (training delivery, curriculum development)
2. Align training with labour market needs
3. Shared investment in skill development
4. Industry-relevant curriculum design
5. Feedback loops for continuous improvement

Flexible Learning Models

1. Encourage -
    1. Modular courses - Stackable credentials, learn at own pace
    2. Online education - Anytime, anywhere learning
    3. Micro-credentials - Short, focused certifications for specific skills
    4. Workplace learning - Apprenticeships, on-the-job training, mentoring
2. Recognize diverse learning pathways
3. Credit transfer and accumulation systems
4. Blended learning (online + offline)
5. Learning accounts for individuals

Social Protection

1. Social security systems support workers during -
    1. Periods of retraining (income support during training)

    2. Job transitions (unemployment benefits, career counselling)
    3. Skill upgradation leaves
2. Portable benefits across jobs
3. Training allowances or stipends
4. Healthcare and pension coverage continuity
5. Lifelong learning entitlements

Additional Recommendations

1. Strengthen labor market information systems
2. Quality assurance and standardization
3. Career guidance and counselling services
4. Recognition of prior learning and experience
5. Investment in digital infrastructure
6. Research on future skills demand
7. International cooperation on skills recognition

8. International Labour Organisation (ILO)

Establishment

1. United Nations agency established 1919
2. Part of Treaty of Versailles ending World War I
3. Became first specialized UN agency in 1946

India's Membership

1. India - founding member 1919 (pre-independence)
2. Active participant in ILO governance
3. Ratified numerous ILO conventions

Membership and Structure

1. 187 member states currently
2. Unique tripartite structure - Only UN agency bringing together -
    1. Governments
    2. Employers
    3. Workers
3. Ensures balanced representation in decision-making

Mandate

1. Sets international labour standards (conventions and recommendations)
2. Develops policies promoting decent work
3. Devises programs for all women and men

4. Social justice and fair labour practices

Headquarters

1. Geneva, Switzerland

Key Functions

1. Standard-setting (conventions, recommendations)
2. Monitoring implementation
3. Technical assistance to member states
4. Research and publications
5. Advocacy for workers' rights

9. Way Forward

Expand Access and Inclusion

1. Universal lifelong learning entitlement
2. Targeted programs for informal workers, women, rural populations
3. Financial support (scholarships, training allowances)
4. Mobile training units for remote areas
5. Digital infrastructure expansion

Integrate Lifelong Learning into Education System

1. NEP 2020 full implementation
2. Vocational education mainstreaming
3. Multiple entry-exit with credit banking
4. Continuous professional development for teachers

Strengthen Industry-Education Linkages

1. Mandatory employer contributions to skill development funds
2. Apprenticeship quotas in industries
3. Industry participation in curriculum design
4. Regular skills gap assessments

Leverage Technology

1. Online learning platforms scaling
2. AI-powered personalized learning
3. Virtual reality for practical training
4. Mobile-based micro-learning
5. Open educational resources

Policy and Institutional Reforms

1. Single nodal agency for lifelong learning coordination

2. Unified National Skills Framework
3. Mutual recognition of credentials (domestic and international)
4. Labor market information systems
5. Performance-based funding for training providers

Social Protection Integration

1. Unemployment insurance with training requirements
2. Training leave provisions in labor laws
3. Portable skill accounts for workers
4. Career transition support services

Monitoring and Evaluation

1. Regular tracer studies on employment outcomes
2. Quality assurance frameworks
3. Data-driven policy adjustments
4. International benchmarking

10. Conclusion

ILO report emphasizes lifelong learning as essential economic and social policy pillar amid rapid technological transformation, green transition, and changing work nature. Addressing inequalities in learning opportunities, shifting from front-loaded to continuous education model, ensuring inclusive access through flexible delivery, strengthening public-private partnerships, and integrating social protection essential. India's Skill India Mission, PMKVY, NEP 2020 provide foundation, but overcoming digital divide, reaching informal workforce, adequate financing, and institutional coordination crucial for realizing lifelong learning vision and ensuring no worker left behind in evolving economy.

Source - [https -//www.thehindu.com/news/international/to-minimise-ais-impact-on-jobs-ilo-bats-for-lifelong-learning/article70943877.ece](https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/to-minimise-ais-impact-on-jobs-ilo-bats-for-lifelong-learning/article70943877.ece)

3. New Geopolitics of Food

A report titled The New Geopolitics of Food by IPES-Food highlights how geopolitical disruptions have enabled large agrifood corporations to earn extraordinary profits, while worsening hunger, food inflation, and environmental degradation across the world.

1.Background

The global food system has undergone significant transformation over recent decades characterized by increasing corporate concentration, financialization of agricultural commodities, and growing dependence on international trade for food security. Historically, food production and distribution involved numerous small and medium enterprises ensuring competitive markets and diverse supply chains. However, successive waves of mergers and acquisitions since 2008 have dramatically reduced the number of major players in critical sectors including seeds, agrochemicals, fertilizers, grain trading, and food processing. This consolidation has created oligopolistic market structures where a handful of multinational corporations' control significant market shares enabling pricing power that smaller competitors cannot exercise. The period following 2020 witnessed unprecedented disruptions to global food systems through multiple simultaneous shocks—COVID-19 pandemic disrupted supply chains and labor availability, climate change intensified extreme weather events affecting crop yields, the Russia-Ukraine conflict disrupted wheat and fertilizer exports from major producing regions, and geopolitical tensions created uncertainty in international trade relationships. These crises generated significant food price volatility with the global food price index reaching record levels in 2022 triggering food inflation worldwide particularly affecting low-income countries dependent on food imports.

While these disruptions created genuine hardships for farmers, consumers, and vulnerable populations, the IPES-Food report argues that large agrifood corporations strategically exploited crisis conditions to increase profit margins beyond what production cost increases warranted. The report titled The New Geopolitics of Food documents how corporations used geopolitical shocks as cover for price increases, limited competition in concentrated markets prevented consumer alternatives, and financial speculation on commodity markets amplified price volatility. This pattern of crisis profiteering while global hunger increased raises fundamental questions about corporate accountability, market regulation, and governance of international food systems.

2.Key Findings of the Report

Corporations Used Crises to Increase Profits

1. The report argues that several agrifood corporations increased prices beyond actual production cost increases during crisis periods.
2. Food inflation after 2020 created opportunities for corporations to raise profit margins using supply disruptions as justification.
3. Limited competition in food markets enabled dominant firms to exercise pricing power without losing market share to competitors.
4. Several companies reportedly increased fertilizer prices beyond actual production cost, thereby earning higher profits through crisis exploitation.

Concentration of Corporate Power

1. Since 2008, a series of mergers and acquisitions has reduced the number of major seed and agrochemical companies from six to four.

2. This consolidation has created oligopolistic market structures across critical agrifood sectors including seeds, pesticides, fertilizers, and grain trading.
3. Four companies now control majority of global commercial seed markets limiting farmer choice and increasing input costs.
4. Reduced competition enables coordinated pricing behaviour and limits innovation that would benefit farmers and consumers.

Price Manipulation During Crises

1. Highly concentrated markets increase the possibility of excessive pricing and profiteering during crises when consumers have limited alternatives.
2. Corporations justified price increases citing supply chain disruptions, energy costs, and geopolitical uncertainties.
3. However, profit margin analysis revealed increases exceeded actual cost pressures faced by companies.
4. Financial speculation on commodity markets amplified price volatility benefiting traders while harming food security.

Concerns Associated with Excessive Corporate Control

Threat to Food Sovereignty

1. Countries may lose control over domestic food systems due to dependence on multinational corporations for seeds, fertilizers, and agrochemicals.
2. Corporate intellectual property rights over seeds prevent farmers from saving and exchanging traditional varieties.
3. Technology lock-in creates long-term dependencies reducing farmer autonomy and national self-reliance.
4. Trade agreements often contain provisions protecting corporate interests over national food security priorities.

Price Manipulation

1. Highly concentrated markets increase possibility of excessive pricing and profiteering during crises when alternatives are limited.
2. Lack of transparency in corporate pricing decisions makes it difficult to verify whether price increases reflect actual costs.
3. Coordinated pricing behaviour in oligopolistic markets can emerge without explicit collusion through price leadership and signalling.

Weakening of Small Farmers

1. Large corporations often dominate supply chains, limiting bargaining power for small producers who become price-takers.
2. Contract farming arrangements Favor corporate buyers over farmers in terms of risk allocation and profit distribution.
3. Input cost increases squeeze farmer margins while final consumer prices remain high, with profits captured by intermediaries.
4. Loss of local seed varieties and traditional farming knowledge reduces agricultural biodiversity and resilience.

Increased Vulnerability to Global Shocks

1. Overdependence on global trade exposes countries to wars, sanctions, shipping disruptions, and commodity price volatility.
2. Long supply chains are vulnerable to multiple disruption points from production regions to final consumers.
3. Just-in-time inventory systems reduce buffer stocks leaving no cushion during sudden supply interruptions.
4. Climate change impacts concentrated production regions simultaneously affecting global availability.

3.Impact on Developing Countries

Food Import Dependence

1. The global food import bill reached approximately US$2.2 trillion in 2025, with sharpest increases occurring in Least Developed Countries and Net Food Importing Developing Countries.
2. Rising import bills strain foreign exchange reserves limiting resources available for development priorities.
3. Dependence on imports exposes countries to international price volatility and geopolitical supply disruptions.
4. Local food production systems are undermined when cheap imports flood markets during surplus years.

Food Inflation

1. Low-income countries experienced higher food inflation than developed nations because poorer countries have limited fiscal capacity to subsidize food and stabilize prices.
2. Food constitutes larger share of household budgets in developing countries magnifying inflation impacts on living standards.
3. Inadequate social safety nets mean vulnerable populations bear full brunt of food price increases.

4. Urban poor and landless rural workers are most affected as they purchase all food requirements from markets.

Rural Poverty and Inequality

1. Small and marginal farmers continued to face rising input costs, limited bargaining power, and unstable incomes, thereby worsening rural distress and inequality.
2. Farmers pay more for seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides while receiving stagnant or declining prices for their produce.
3. Lack of access to credit, insurance, and markets perpetuates poverty traps in rural areas.
4. Youth migration from agriculture to urban areas depletes rural communities of productive workforce.

Significance for India

1. In India public procurement and buffer stock system helped stabilize domestic food prices during earlier global food crises.
2. Institutions such as the Food Corporation of India and Public Distribution System ensured that food grains remained accessible to large sections of population.
3. However, India is not immune to global price shocks particularly for commodities not covered by procurement systems.
4. Dependence on imported edible oils and pulses exposes Indian consumers to international price volatility.

4.Way Forward

Strengthen Domestic Agriculture

1. Governments should strengthen domestic agriculture through greater public investment, improved irrigation and storage infrastructure, diversified cropping systems, and stronger farmer support mechanisms ensuring self-reliance in staple foods, reducing vulnerability to international price shocks, while providing remunerative prices to farmers through procurement systems and market interventions stabilizing both producer and consumer prices.

Revive Public Food Reserves

1. Countries should revive public food reserves, buffer stock systems, marketing boards, and supply management mechanisms to stabilize food prices during global crises, building adequate strategic reserves of essential commodities, while coordinating regional buffer stocks among neighbouring countries enabling mutual support during localized production failures without depending on volatile international markets.

Strengthen Competition Laws

1. Governments should strengthen competition laws and anti-monopoly regulations to prevent excessive concentration of market power in agrifood sectors, scrutinizing mergers and acquisitions

that reduce competition, while investigating pricing behaviour during crises ensuring price increases reflect genuine cost pressures rather than profiteering, and imposing penalties on companies found guilty of price manipulation.

Promote Sustainable Agriculture

1. Sustainable agriculture should be promoted through agroecological and climate-resilient farming practices reducing dependence on expensive external inputs, supporting farmer-led seed systems preserving agricultural biodiversity, while investing in research and extension for sustainable practices suitable to local conditions, and providing incentives for farmers adopting environmentally friendly methods including organic farming and natural resource conservation.

Reform Global Food Governance

1. International institutions should prioritize food security, fair agricultural trade, debt relief for vulnerable countries, and equitable global food systems over corporate interests, reforming trade rules that disadvantage small farmers and food-importing countries, while establishing international mechanisms for coordinating food reserves and emergency assistance during crises, and ensuring transparency in commodity markets preventing speculation that amplifies price volatility.

Conclusion

The IPES-Food report titled The New Geopolitics of Food reveals how geopolitical disruptions enabled large agrifood corporations to earn extraordinary profits while worsening hunger, food inflation, and environmental degradation worldwide. Key findings include corporations using crises to increase prices beyond actual production cost increases, concentration of corporate power through mergers reducing major seed and agrochemical companies from six to four, and price manipulation possibilities in highly concentrated markets. Developing countries experienced severe impacts including rising food import bills reaching US$2.2 trillion in 2025 with sharpest increases in Least Developed Countries, higher food inflation due to limited fiscal capacity for subsidies, and worsening rural poverty and inequality among small farmers. India's public procurement and buffer stock systems including Food Corporation of India and Public Distribution System helped stabilize domestic prices during earlier crises. Addressing these challenges requires strengthening domestic agriculture through public investment and farmer support, reviving public food reserves and buffer stocks, strengthening competition laws preventing excessive market concentration, promoting sustainable agroecological practices, and reforming global food governance prioritizing food security over corporate interests.

Source - [https -//www.downtoearth.org.in/food/cascade-of-geopolitical-shocks-has-handed-agrifood-corporations-a-windfall-report](https://www.downtoearth.org.in/food/cascade-of-geopolitical-shocks-has-handed-agrifood-corporations-a-windfall-report)

4. National Health Accounts Estimates 2022-23

The Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare recently released the 10th National Health Accounts Estimates for India, covering the financial year 2022-23 and providing comprehensive insights into healthcare financing patterns.

1. These estimates indicate a gradual shift toward greater public financing of healthcare and reduced financial vulnerability for households between 2013-14 and 2022-23.
2. The NHA Estimates represent a critical data source for understanding India's progress toward Universal Health Coverage and informing evidence-based health policy formulation.

1.Key Highlights of the NHA Estimates 2022-23

Rising Government Health Expenditure

1. Government Health Expenditure increased nearly threefold from 1.30 lakh crore rupees in 2013-14 to 3.85 lakh crore rupees in 2022-23, demonstrating substantial government commitment to healthcare.
2. In per capita terms, government health expenditure rose 2.7 times, from 1,042 rupees to 2,786 rupees, reflecting increased per-person investment in healthcare.
3. Government Health Expenditure as a share of GDP rose from 1.15 percent to 1.43 percent, indicating improved budgetary prioritization of healthcare.
4. Under the new GDP series with base year 2022-23, government health expenditure stands at 1.48 percent of GDP.
5. Its share in General Government Expenditure improved from 3.78 percent to 4.89 percent, showing healthcare's increasing importance in total government spending.

Total Healthcare Expenditure

1. The Total Healthcare Expenditure for India in fiscal year 2022-23 is valued at 7,66,814 crore rupees, reflecting substantial aggregate spending from all sources.
2. This comprehensive figure includes government spending, household out-of-pocket expenditure, insurance payments, and external health-related funding.

Strengthened Public Financing Role

1. The share of Government Health Expenditure in Total Health Expenditure increased from 28.6 percent to 43.7 percent, indicating a stronger role of public financing in India's health sector.
2. This shift reflects deliberate government policy prioritizing public health financing to reduce household financial burden and improve health security.

Declining Out-of-Pocket Expenditure

1. Out-of-Pocket Expenditure as a share of Total Health Expenditure declined substantially from 64.2 percent in 2013-14 to 43.4 percent in 2022-23, reflecting reduced direct financial burden on households.
2. This decline demonstrates improved financial protection for vulnerable populations against catastrophic health expenditure.
3. During the peak COVID-19 period in 2021-22, emergency public health responses pushed Government Health Expenditure to 1.84 percent of GDP, while Out-of-Pocket Expenditure fell to a historic low of 39.4 percent.

Primary Healthcare Emphasis

1. Government spending on primary healthcare more than doubled from approximately 0.5 lakh crore rupees in 2013-14 to 1.4 lakh crore rupees in 2022-23, indicating strategic prioritization of preventive care.
2. This investment reflects recognition that primary healthcare reduces disease burden and improves population health outcomes cost-effectively.

Expansion of Social Security and Insurance

1. Social Security Expenditure on healthcare, including Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana, government employee reimbursements, and social insurance, increased from 6 percent to 9.9 percent of Total Health Expenditure.
2. The share of private health insurance also increased from 3.4 percent to 9.2 percent, indicating growing reliance on insurance mechanisms for healthcare financing.

2.About National Health Accounts Estimates

Institutional Framework

1. National Health Accounts Estimates provide a systematic picture of healthcare financing in India by tracking sources of funds, financing schemes, providers, and health functions comprehensively.
2. The preparation of NHA estimates was institutionalized in 2014 at the National Health Systems Resource Centre, which serves as the National Health Accounts Technical Secretariat.

Methodology and Standards

1. The NHA uses the System of Health Accounts 2011 framework, an internationally accepted standard allowing global benchmarking of health finances and comparative analysis.
2. This standardized approach enables India to compare healthcare financing patterns with other countries and assess progress toward international health targets.

3.Significance of NHA 2022-23 Estimates

Progress Toward Universal Health Coverage

1. The NHA 2022-23 estimates indicate India's movement toward Universal Health Coverage through higher public health spending, reduced household financial burden, and greater focus on primary healthcare.
2. Improved financial protection from catastrophic health expenditure enables vulnerable populations to access needed healthcare without economic distress.

Reduced Household Financial Burden

1. The decline in Out-of-Pocket Expenditure from 64.2 percent to 43.4 percent reflects substantially improved financial protection for households against healthcare costs.
2. This reduction ensures that healthcare needs do not force households into poverty or debt.

Strengthening Public Health Financing

1. The rise in Government Health Expenditure from 28.6 percent to 43.7 percent of Total Health Expenditure shows the expanding role of the state in financing healthcare and ensuring equitable access.

Shift Toward Preventive Healthcare

1. The doubling of government spending on primary healthcare highlights a policy shift toward preventive, promotive, and early-stage healthcare reducing long-term disease burden and improving population health.

4.Challenges Requiring Attention

Continued Private Healthcare Dependence

1. Despite improvements, a large section of the population still relies on private hospitals, diagnostics, and medicines, exposing households to financial distress and catastrophic expenditure.

Below-Policy Expenditure Targets

1. Although government health expenditure has increased significantly, it remains below the National Health Policy 2017 target of 2.5 percent of GDP, requiring sustained fiscal commitment.

Quality and Accessibility Gaps

1. Higher expenditure alone may not translate into improved health outcomes unless accompanied by better doctor-patient ratios, medicine availability, diagnostics, and healthcare infrastructure quality.

Interstate Health Disparities

1. Significant variations persist across states in health infrastructure, institutional capacity, and service delivery, leading to unequal healthcare access.

5.Way Forward

1. **Increase Public Health Expenditure** - India should progressively raise public health spending toward the 2.5 percent of GDP target, emphasizing primary, preventive, and community healthcare systems.

2. **Strengthen Primary Healthcare Ecosystem** - Greater investment is needed in Primary Health Centres, telemedicine, immunization, screening programs, and frontline healthcare workers ensuring affordable accessible care.
3. **Reduce Household Financial Burden** - The government should expand insurance coverage, regulate private healthcare pricing, ensure affordable medicines, and improve access to low-cost diagnostics.

Source - https -//www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2265816&reg=3&lang=2

5. National Family Health Survey (NFHS)-6

The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has released the National Family Health Survey (NFHS)-6, the most comprehensive health survey conducted across India. NFHS-6 was conducted during 2023-24 covering nearly 6.79 lakh households across 715 districts providing critical data on population health and family welfare. The survey reveals steady progress in maternal and child health alongside emerging non-communicable disease burdens.

1.About National Family Health Survey (NFHS)-6

Survey Methodology and Coverage

1. The NFHS-6 was conducted during 2023-24 by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare with the International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS), Mumbai as the nodal agency.
2. Covering nearly 6.79 lakh households across 715 districts in all States and UTs except Manipur, the survey provides evidence on population, health, nutrition, and family welfare indicators.
3. It supports evidence-based planning and programme implementation up to the district level enabling targeted interventions.

2.Major Findings of NFHS-6

Improvements in Maternal and Child Healthcare

1. 95.9% of pregnant women received antenatal care (ANC), demonstrating near-universal coverage of prenatal services.
2. Mothers receiving ANC in the first trimester increased from 70.0% to 76.2%, enabling early risk detection and intervention.
3. Early antenatal care enables identification of complications and timely management improving maternal outcomes.

Institutional Delivery Progress

1. Institutional deliveries increased from 88.6% to 90.6%, moving India closer toward universal coverage and safer delivery practices.

2. Births attended by skilled health personnel improved from 89.4% to 91.3%, ensuring professional management of labor and delivery complications.
3. Institutional delivery reduces maternal and neonatal mortality through access to emergency obstetric care.

Rising Caesarean Section Rates

1. Caesarean section deliveries have increased sharply from 21.5% to 27.2% nationally, with the C-section rate in urban areas reaching 40%.
2. This rate far exceeds the World Health Organization's optimal threshold of 10-15%, raising concerns about overuse of surgical intervention.
3. Excessive cesarean sections increase maternal morbidity, hospitalization costs, and recovery complications.

Maternal Nutrition Improvements

1. Mothers consuming iron folic acid supplements for 100 days or more during pregnancy increased from 44.1% to 54.9%.
2. Those consuming supplements for 180 days or more rose from 26.0% to 37.8%, improving pregnancy outcomes and reducing anaemia-related complications.
3. Adequate micronutrient supplementation reduces maternal anaemia, prevents preterm births, and improves fatal development.

Family Planning Progress

1. India's Total Fertility Rate (TFR) remains at 2.0, achieving replacement level fertility.
2. The Contraceptive Prevalence Rate (CPR) increased from 66.7% to 69.1%, reflecting expanding access to family planning methods.
3. Higher contraceptive use enables women to space pregnancies and plan family sizes.

Child Immunization Success

1. Full vaccination coverage among children aged 12-23 months based on vaccination cards increased from 83.8% to 87.1%.
2. 95.6% of children received most vaccinations through public health facilities, demonstrating confidence in government immunization programs.
3. Any vaccine received by children aged 12-23 months remains consistently high above 96%, indicating high program coverage.

Child Nutrition Improvements

1. 95.6% of children under six months of age were found to be breastfed during the survey period, promoting optimal nutrition.

2. Stunting (low height for age) among children under five years declined substantially from 35.5% to 29.3%, indicating improved nutritional status.
3. Severe wasting declined sharply from 7.7% to 5.2%, while underweight prevalence in under-five children registered marginal decline from 32.1% to 31.8%.

Health Protection Expansion

1. Health insurance/financing scheme coverage has expanded significantly from 41.0% to 60.2% at the household level.
2. Expanded coverage improves access to healthcare and protects families from catastrophic health expenses.

Women's Empowerment and Financial Inclusion

1. Women who had ever used the internet nearly doubled from 33.3% to 64.3%, enabling digital access and information availability.
2. Women having a bank or savings account they themselves use increased from 78.6% to 89.0%, improving financial independence.
3. Women having a mobile phone they themselves use rose from 53.9% to 63.6%, enabling communication and information access.
4. The use of hygienic methods of menstrual protection among women aged 15-24 years increased from 77.6% to 79.2%.

3.Way Forward

Addressing Non-Communicable Disease Burden

1. Emerging challenges such as rising non-communicable diseases and dual burden of undernutrition and rising overweight/obesity highlight the need for continued preventive healthcare focus.
2. Screening and management programs must expand for NCDs including diabetes, hypertension, and cardiovascular disease.

Reducing Excessive Caesarean Sections

1. Address high cesarean section rates through guidelines promoting vaginal delivery in appropriate cases.
2. Training and mentoring programs should emphasize evidence-based delivery management.

Sustaining Gains Through Convergence

1. With continued emphasis on convergence, last-mile delivery, and inclusive growth, India is well-positioned to sustain these gains and further improve health and well-being.
2. Integration of health programs ensures efficient resource use and comprehensive service coverage.

UPSC Mains Relevance

1. **GS Paper 2** - Public health systems, maternal and child health, healthcare access, health equity, gender empowerment.
2. **GS Paper 3** - Healthcare infrastructure, public health spending, nutrition, communicable and non-communicable diseases.
3. Understanding NFHS findings is essential for analysing India's progress toward Sustainable Development Goals and public health performance.

Source - https -//www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=2266600&reg=3&lang=1