



# Improving India's female labour force participation rate

**Envisioning an  
inclusive workforce**

A KPMG in India report



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# Greater gender equality at the workplace can lead to

**Better organisational performance**



**Business diversification**



**Increased productivity**



## Where are we now?

The gender gap stands at **23%** globally and is not expected to close until 2086.<sup>1</sup>

India's declining **Female Labour Force Participation Rate (FLFPR)** was ranked

**140** out of **156** countries in **2021**.<sup>2</sup>

Bridging the gender gap fully in workplaces in India with the inclusion of **68 million** more women to the workforce could add a **60 per cent** higher GDP than that projected for 2025.<sup>3</sup>



# Moving towards an inclusive future



## Extensive Information, Education, and Communication (IEC)

campaigns need to be launched to generate awareness about **gender sensitivity, remove access barriers, create more entry options for women** and **celebrate women already in the workforce**



For **better policy measures, pan-India gender disaggregated data collection** could allow all stakeholders to create **more nuanced interventions** that would improve FLFPR in India



Initiation of **gender-neutral job valuations, wage transparency, flexible working hours, supportive infrastructure** and **improvement of girls' enrolment across primary and secondary schools** could ensure long and lasting change



1. SDG 8: Promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all, 2021.

2. Global Gender Gap reports (2020 & 2021), World Economic Forum

3. The Power of Parity: Advancing Women's Equality in India, McKinsey & Company, November 2015.

# A Foreword

Ensuring equal participation of women in the workforce is imperative for realizing women's rights and gender equality. There is evidence to suggest that greater gender equality at the workplace results in increased productivity, business diversification and better organizational performance. Inclusion of women in workforce is critical for progress and achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), directly addressing SDG 5, 8 and 10, and also indirectly addressing other goals.

India has seen a declining trend of female labour force participation in rural areas and stagnation in urban areas. The challenge has been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, with women significantly losing more jobs than men, in the informal as well as the formal sector. Concerted efforts have been driven by the Government of India (GoI), including targeted policies, incentives and reforms to drive initiatives for promoting participation of women in the workforce. Dedicated schemes have been institutionalised to provide access to finance to women led enterprises. Vocational training and industry placement programmes led by GoI are targeted towards empowering women through skill development. Today, the imperative is to provide sustainable residential and utility infrastructure to women, which would encourage women's participation as well as retention in the workforce.

In addition to government efforts, there is immense scope for the private sector to contribute to this effort and make workspaces more accessible and promote equality and job parity. Many firms in India have taken steps towards policies aimed at employing

and retaining women, resources to maintain work life balance and skilling women. More needs to be done to increase the gender parity in leadership positions.

This document assesses the declining trend of female labour force participation, the underlying factors and the existing challenges that remain to be addressed by the government, private sector and the society as a whole, in order to improve women's representation in the labour force. Good practices have been highlighted emerging from targeted interventions led by government, private sector, development partners and other agencies. We provide recommendations on how integrated approaches, inclusive of gender focused interventions, can create an enabling environment to address this challenge and meet India's commitment to the SDGs.



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# B Setting the Context

Equal participation of women in the workforce is central to realising women's rights and gender equality. Evidence suggests that greater gender equality at the workplace results in increased productivity, business diversification and better organizational performance.<sup>1</sup> The growing recognition of the untapped potential of women's workforce participation in yielding social and economic gains has made it an important focus for global development policy.

This report aims at building the business case for gender inclusion and parity at workplaces. It presents an analysis of the issues and

challenges underlying the declining Female Labour Force Participation Rate (FLFPR) and provides a set of recommendations for promoting gender inclusion at the workplace.



## The business case for gender equality – the window of opportunity for India and beyond

Gender equality has yielded positive social and economic dividends. There is a strong evidence base linking diverse workplaces with increased profitability, and enhanced organizational productivity and performance. Tapping into women's unique contributions and experiences can strengthen organizations and can contribute significantly to the global GDP. It is estimated that USD 12 trillion could be added to the global

GDP by 2025 by advancing women's equality.<sup>2</sup>

There is a significant opportunity for India to increase productivity and to meet the employable workforce shortage by engaging more women in the workforce. An estimated USD 2.9 trillion of additional annual GDP could be added in India by fully bridging the gender gap in the workplace, which is 60 per cent higher than the projected

GDP for 2025. This will result in the addition of 68 million more women into the workforce by 2025.<sup>3</sup>

This presents an opportunity for engaging more women in the economy, especially for private sector organizations. Select evidences of the contribution of gender diversity and inclusion towards the Indian economy have been summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1: Evidence of contribution of Gender Diversity towards Indian economy<sup>4,5,6,7</sup>**

Primary Sector	Secondary Sector & MSMEs	Tertiary Sector
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>During the cropping season in India, women farmers work nearly 3,300 hours, twice as much as their male counterparts</li> <li>On Indian farms, almost 75% of full-time workers are women which means female farmers fulfil 60-80% of India's food requirements.</li> </ul>	<p>Women entrepreneur led MSMEs have consistently performed better than those being run by their male counterparts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Greater profit margins in businesses than those of men – 31% compared to 19%</li> <li>Banks attribute lower non-performing assets (NPA) to women; women in PSBs accounted for 4% of NPAs on MSME loans, lower than overall average of 6.2%.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>During the cropping season in India, women farmers work nearly 3,300 hours, twice as much as their male counterparts</li> <li>On Indian farms, almost 75% of full-time workers are women which means female farmers fulfil 60-80% of India's food requirements.</li> </ul>

1. Research: When Gender Diversity Makes Firms More Productive, Harvard Business Review, February 2019.

2. The Power of Parity: How advancing women's equality can add \$12 trillion to global growth, McKinsey Global Institute, September 2015.

3. The Power of Parity: Advancing Women's Equality in India, McKinsey & Company, November 2015.

4. When Women Farm India's Land: How to Increase Ownership?, Oxfam India Policy Brief, Lucy Dubochet, October 2013.

5. Financial Inclusion for Women-Owned Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in India, International Finance Corporation, 2017.

6. SelectHER: Women in the Workforce, Sattva, August 2018.

7. Women on Board and Performance of Family Firms: Evidence from India, SSRN, Jayati Sarkar, December 2015.

# C The existing challenges of women workforce participation

The identification of opportunities and challenges in enhancing women's representation in the labour force is pivotal for formulating gender-responsive labour market policies. This section explores the declining trend of female labour participation in India, the underlying factors, and the overall challenges in the landscape.

## C.1 Female Labour Force Participation – Global and Domestic trends

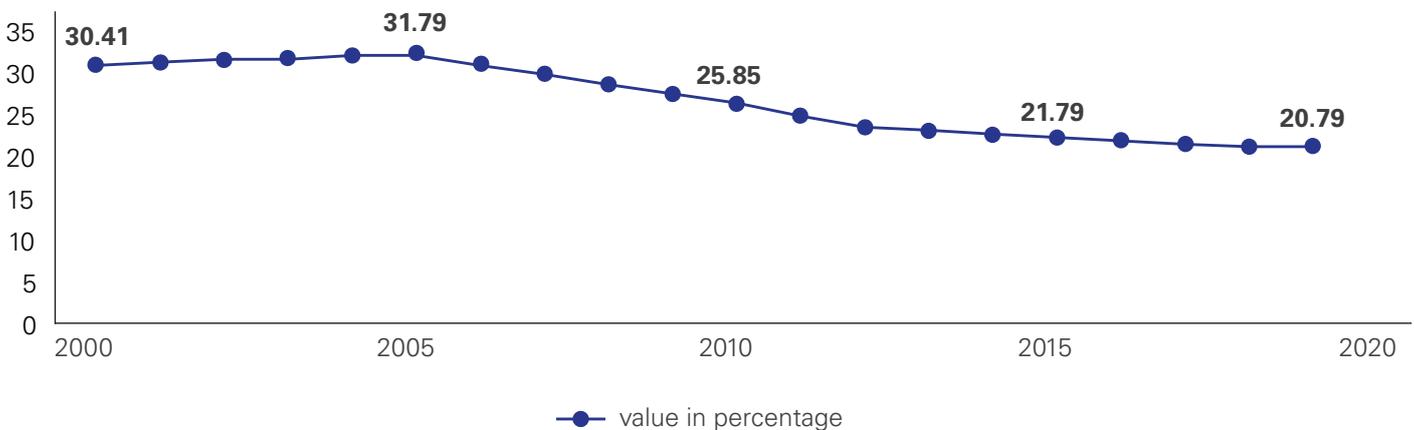
Across the global workforce, only 63 per cent of women aged 25 to 54 are a part of the labour force as compared to 94 per cent of men from the same age group.<sup>8</sup> At current rate of change in employment levels, the gender gap, which stands at 23 per cent globally, is not expected to close until 2086 or possibly beyond.<sup>9</sup> Further, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the resultant economic recession has had a further regressive effect on gender equality at the workplace. Evidence suggests that women have been disproportionately impacted by the

economic impact of the pandemic. A study reported that in crisis, women's jobs were 1.8 times more vulnerable than men's jobs.<sup>10</sup> Women represented 39 percent of global employment in 2019 but accounted for 54 percent of overall job losses.<sup>11</sup> As a result, participation of women in the workforce is decreasing faster than the average rate of labour participation.<sup>12</sup>

Despite being home to 17 per cent of the world's women population, India has a declining FLFPR.<sup>13</sup> The Exhibit 1 depicts how Female Labour

Force Participation rate<sup>14</sup> (of female population aged 15-64 years) as a percentage of total labour force in India has declined significantly from 31.79 per cent in 2005 to 20.79 per cent in 2019. Data from the National Sample Survey reveals that the FLFPR has been on the decline in rural areas and has remained stagnant in the urban areas since the 1980s. This issue of declining rural work participation rates is of importance as it means that rural women have lesser access to the workforce than women in urban settings.

**Exhibit 1: Female Labour Force Participation in India Across Decades<sup>15</sup>**



8. SDG 8: Promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all, 2021.

9. *ibid.*

10. COVID-19 and gender equality: Countering the regressive effects, McKinsey & Company, Anu Madgavkar, April 2021.

11. *ibid.*

12. *ibid.*

13. No place for women: What drives India's ever-declining female labour force? Economic Times, June 2021.

14. Labour force participation rate, female (Per cent of female population ages 15+) (modelled ILO estimate)- India, World Bank, June 2021.

15. *Ibid.*

India's rank has been declining in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap reports. It was ranked at 140 out of 156 countries in 2021 as compared to the rank of 112 in 2020. The year-on-year decline can be attributed to the decrease in share of women in professional as well as technical roles, along with low representation of women in senior and managerial positions. Further, a decrease was also observed on the 'political empowerment' sub-index that witnessed India regressing by 13.5 percentage points, with a significant decline in the number of women ministers (from 23.1 per cent in 2019 to 9.1 per cent in 2021).<sup>16</sup>

Thus, long term trends indicate that the female labour force participation rates in India have declined, with rural women leaving India's workforce at a faster rate than urban women.<sup>17</sup>

## C.2 Effect of COVID-19 on female labour force participation

The nationwide lockdown imposed in India on 23 March 2020 adversely impacted the labour market. Between March 2020 and April 2020, nearly 113.6 million workers lost their jobs, out of which 15.4 million were women. While the absolute decline in male employment was greater, the proportionate decline for women was higher, with 37 per cent of women having lost their jobs as against 28 per cent of men.<sup>18</sup>

The stereotypical role of women only being 'homemakers' was amplified during the pandemic as the burden of unpaid care work increased and mobility restrictions added to the declining FLFPR. Male employees were preferred over female employees in sectors such as construction, manufacturing, and related services where historically women have been considered secondary income earners.<sup>19</sup>



## C.3 Factors effecting female workforce participation

To understand the dynamics of female labour force participation, it is important to recognise the underlying context within which various factors that affect participation operate. Some of the key factors in the Indian context have been highlighted below.

### i. Literacy Rate and Formal Employment Generation

For the third year in a row, the average literacy rate of females aged between 15 and 49 years has shown an overall increase in India — 84.8 per cent in 2016, 85.3 per cent in 2017 and 87 per cent in 2018.<sup>20</sup> However, the growth in formal sector jobs has not kept pace with the supply of educated women — leading to 'crowding out' of females in the workforce.

### ii. Domestic working hours

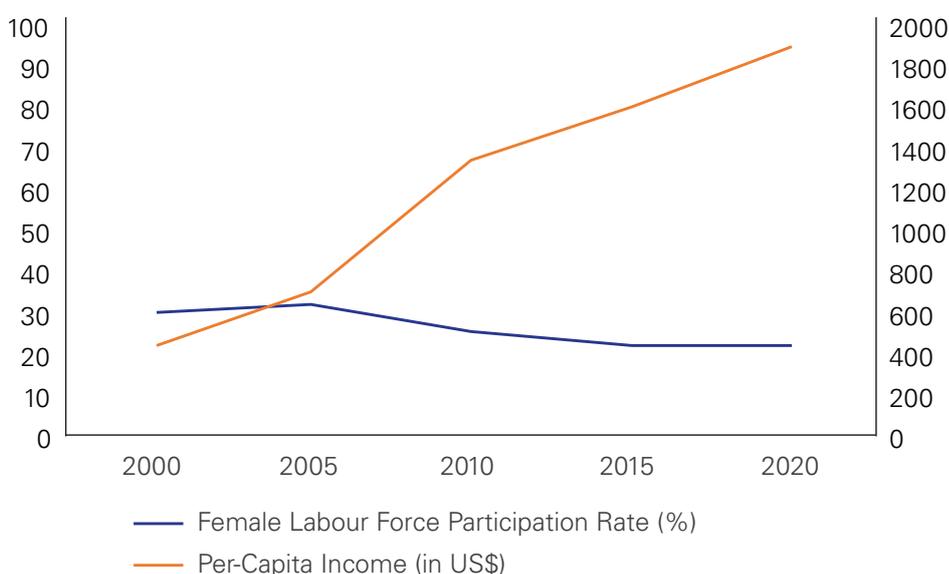
Indian women spend five hours a day on unpaid care work, which is almost four times as much as Indian men.<sup>21</sup> This indicates the availability of lesser time for pursuing employment opportunities and workforce participation.

### iii. Income levels

Rising income levels are inversely linked to the labour force participation of women, as highlighted in the figure below. This trend may be attributed

to incidence of women withdrawing from the workforce as a result of the family's improved socio-economic status.

**Exhibit 2: Inverse trend for FLFPR and Per Capita Income<sup>22</sup>**



16. ibid

17. Women Left Behind: India's Falling Female Labor Participation, The Diplomat, Bansari Kamdar, July 2020.

18. It is time to address COVID-19's disproportionate impact on India's women, Asian Development Bank, Prabhjot Khan, January 2021.

19. India's Missing Working Women: Tracing the Journey of Women's Economic Contribution Over the Last Five Decades, and During COVID-19, SSRN, Mitali Nikore, January 2021.

20. Sample Registration System Survey, 2018.

21. Time Use in India Survey, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, 2019.

22. GDP per capita (current US\$) – India and Labour force participation rate, female (% of female population ages 15+) (modelled ILO estimate), World Bank, 2020.

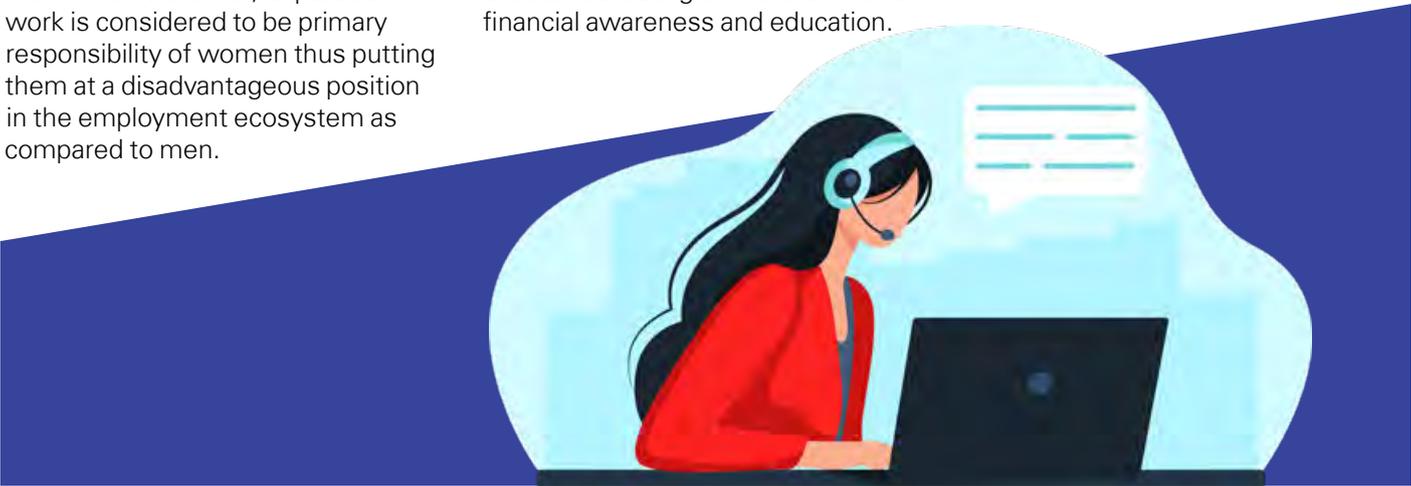
**iv. Gender norms**

The prevailing socio-cultural norms and traditional gender roles also act as a barrier to women's participation in the workforce. In India, the perception of higher prestige or social status for families keep women out of workforce. Moreover, unpaid care work is considered to be primary responsibility of women thus putting them at a disadvantageous position in the employment ecosystem as compared to men.

**v. Access to Finance**

Access to capital for financing capital and operational expenditure of business ventures is a very significant factor for women business owners. Women entrepreneurs' access to market finance is dependent on access to banking services as well as financial awareness and education.

Mobility, safety, and security of women are also key factors which are linked to the female workforce participation rates. Thus, for women to be able to participate in the labour market, they must have the time, agency, and opportunity to do so.



**C.4 Challenges that remain to be addressed**

Gender is a principal factor that influences the opportunities that eventually become available to women as discussed above.

The exhibit given below lists the key challenges that remain to be addressed by three main stakeholders i.e. the government, private sector, and community.

**Exhibit 3: Key Challenges - Government, Private Sector and Community**

<p><b>Government</b></p> 	<p><b>Private Sector</b></p> 	<p><b>Community</b></p> 
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scope for increased focus on skilling for non-traditional roles for women, including those in technology-based roles</li> <li>• Low focus on monetary and non-monetary incentives for vocational education and training courses</li> <li>• Low scale of social infrastructure for women, including government hostels and creches</li> <li>• Provision of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) services to women – only 29% of women have access to internet</li> <li>• Need for adequate childcare facilities and gender-responsive workplace policies e.g. paternity leave</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inadequate representation of women in top management/ decision making roles, with only 11% representation of women in senior leadership roles in India</li> <li>• Gender skill gap in technical roles; Women form a mere 26% representation in Information Technology (IT) and Information Technology Enabled Services (ITES) roles at corporate organisations across India, a relatively lower number compared to the overall 31% representation in non-technical roles.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Double Burden of Work' for women, since they are often perceived as primary caregivers</li> <li>• Limited access to co-ed training facilities, along with time restrictions for travel which further restrict mobility</li> </ul>

# D Key Government initiatives to promote gender inclusion in Indian economy

Women's economic empowerment is crucial to India's development story. Economic empowerment of women directly addresses multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), namely reducing inequality (SDG 10), gender equality (SDG 5) and decent work and economic growth (SDG 8). With the aim to achieve these global goals by 2030, the Government of India has initiated several policies and frameworks to reverse the declining trend in the FLFPR.

## 1. Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK) for providing access to finance

RMK is an autonomous body under the Ministry of Women and Child Development, with an aim to provide micro-credit facilities and empower women through multi-pronged interventions. In the year 2014-15, the Government decided to revamp the organization to ensure that the loan procedures are simplified, and the rate of interest is revised. During FY 2020-21, the RMK extended its Intermediary Micro-financing Organizations (IMOs) that work at the grassroots and disbursed Rs. 315.13 crore to 7,41,163 women entrepreneurs.<sup>23</sup>

## 2. Availability of dedicated social infrastructure for women

Recognising the need for developing residential and utility infrastructure for working women, the central government has been implementing the working women's hostel scheme since 1972-73 to improve the transition of women into the labour force. Until 2019, 952 hostels were sanctioned to benefit 77,268 working women; however, there is a significant need for scaling up the existing infrastructure, and this remains a challenge.<sup>24</sup>

## 3. E-marketplaces for establishing market linkages for women led enterprises

The Ministry of Women and Child Development launched the Mahila

E-Haat in 2016 to provide web-based marketing platforms to women entrepreneurs to enable them to sell their products directly to consumers. However, significant efforts are required to upscale such platforms and bring more women led businesses into the umbrella of similar aggregator platforms being run by the Government.

## 4. Sanchar Shakti Pilot Scheme for access to Information and Communication Technology (ICT) enabled services

The scheme was launched as pilot project with the aim to facilitate women's Self-Help Groups (SHGs) access to ICT enabled services. The scheme for Mobile Value-Added Services (VAS) provisioning contributed to the development of content/information customized according to the requirements of women SHG members who are engaged in diverse activities across rural areas in India.

## 5. Schemes of Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) for skilling women

Since its inception, the MSDE has undertaken several initiatives to achieve women's empowerment through skill development. Eighteen National Skill Training Institutes (for women) are actively imparting basic and theoretical knowledge to women under the National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme in all Centrally Funded Institutes (CFIs).

Several areas are given importance such as Office Management, Electronics, Fashion Design and Technology, Computer Aided Embroidery and Designing. The MSDE is also focused on preparing women for futuristic jobs in the field of Artificial Intelligence, 3D printing, Data analysis, automobile mechanics etc. Going forward, MSDE has been planning towards development of policies, focused on vocational education and training courses, with the right set of monetary and non-monetary incentives to incentivize female students and women to take up skilling.

Through a network of approximately **15,042 Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs)**, nearly **22.82 lakh** candidates have been enrolled **with a special focus on women candidates**. There is a **97 per cent** increase in **women candidates taking admission** in 2018, compared to 2014



23. Annual Report, Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India, December 2020.

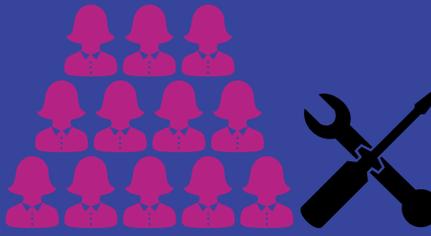
24. Hostels for Working Women, Press Information Bureau, 2019.

## 6. Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY)

The aim of this programme implemented by MSDE is to promote the economic participation of women by introducing gender mainstreaming in skill development. Nearly 50 per cent of 56 lakh people enrolled are women. While women are expected to participate in stereotypical sectors such as apparel, beauty and wellness, and healthcare, this flagship programme of the Ministry aims to place an emphasis on non-traditional livelihood such as those in hardware and electronics. As a result, nearly 1.03 lakh women are enrolled as Field Technicians.<sup>25</sup>

Additionally, there are approximately 25 Ministries and Departments that have schemes on skilling and entrepreneurship. This includes the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Urban Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NULM), National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM), as well as the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Ministry of Railways, Women and Child Development and others. The table below indicates other schemes that are intended to improve women's economic development and participation. .

Under **PMKVY**, nearly **1.03 lakh women** are enrolled in **technical roles** such as **Field Technicians**



**Table 2: Other Programmes Affecting Women's Economic Empowerment and Participation<sup>26</sup>**

Sr. No.	Name of the Scheme	Aim of the Scheme
1	<b>Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP)</b>	Ensures the education, protection, and survival, of the girl child.
2	<b>Scheme for Adolescent Girls (SAG)</b>	To empower girls in the age group of 11-18 by improving their social status through nutrition, life skills, and vocational training.
3	<b>Sukanya Samridhi Yojana (SSY)</b>	To economically empower girls by opening their bank accounts.
4	<b>Skill Upgradation and Mahila Coir Yojana</b>	An exclusive training programme of MSME aimed at the skill development of women artisans who are engaged in the coir industry.
5	<b>Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP)</b>	A credit-linked subsidy programme that is aimed at generating self-employment opportunities in the non-farm sector through the establishment of micro-enterprises.



25. Women get special focus under Skill India Mission, Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, 2019.

26. Initiatives by Government for reducing gender gap in all aspects of social, economic, and political life, Press Information Bureau, 2021.

## Enabling regulatory reforms

The Government of India has shown a commitment to build an inclusive workforce by ensuring women employees across companies and organizations are safe and protected. In order to create safe workplaces, the Government initiated the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act of 2013, also known as POSH Act 2013, developed using the Vishakha Guidelines of 1997, to protect women employees in the workforce.

The definition of “aggrieved women” as part of this Act is wide and covers all women, irrespective of their employment status, age, or type of company that they work for. Women can write complaints to the internal or local complaints committee or through the Ministry of Women and Child Development’s Sexual Harassment electronic-box that was launched in November 2017.<sup>27</sup> The Ministry of Corporate Affairs further strengthened the POSH Act in 2018 by making it mandatory for all private companies to make disclosures around their compliance of the law through their Annual Board Report.<sup>28</sup>

The Government, via Section 149 of the Companies Act (2013), has also made it mandatory for all listed and public companies to include at least one woman director on the board to ensure corporate board diversity. Since the initiation of this policy, corporate boardrooms are gradually becoming more inclusive, with India witnessing an 8.6 per cent increase in the overall number of women on boards between 2012 and 2020.<sup>29</sup>



27. Eight years on, India’s law on to prevent workplace sexual harassment data collection, Anu Bhuyan, Scroll, 2021.  
28. Disclosure of compliance under POSH Act 2013 in annual reports of private companies now mandatory, UnGender, 2018.  
29. Getting more inclusive: Women now hold 17 per cent board positions in India Inc., Economic Times, 2020.

# E Good Practices from Public and Private Sectors

As discussed above, there is evidence that women and girls have limited access to employment options, financial and physical resources, as well as education and skilling opportunities.<sup>30</sup> However, certain good practices and flagship initiatives of organizations, along with interventions led by civil society organizations, CSR programmes led by private sector organizations, and solutions laid out by the Government have been disrupting the status quo and enhancing women's access to opportunities in several ways. Some of the programmes have been thematically discussed below.

## E1. Return to formal education

As discussed in the previous sections, the access to formal education for women must be focused on and improved to enhance women's economic participation. Over the years, the Government of India has taken several steps to enhance access to education such as the National Curriculum Framework of 2005, the Samagra Shiksha scheme as well as the flagship Right to Education Act of 2009. The Government has also focused on building Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas (KGBVs) for the educationally backward blocks (EBBs) to ensure women and girls get improved access to education. The government has also been facilitating several gender sensitization trainings, curriculum reforms, and building toilets and constructing residential quarters for female teachers to ensure women have continued access to formal education.

Indian states are also initiating policies to ensure women are incentivized for receiving formal education. Some of the unique initiatives taken by states to boost women's access to education are as follows:

- i. Tamil Nadu has offered a 50 per cent subsidy to women to purchase scooters to improve connectivity to educational institutes. It is the only Indian state to provide free laptops with internet connection to students, including girls in Classes 11 and 12, to incentivize them to continue their education. As of 2020-21, the state budget allocated for this programme is Rs. 949 crores and further, under the free laptop distribution scheme, a total of 5 lakh students are expected to receive laptops.<sup>31</sup>
- ii. In the state of Punjab, free education for girls from nursery to

PhD level in government schools and colleges has been announced. The state has also committed to providing free textbooks to all students in government schools as well Wi-Fi connection for 13,000 primary schools and all 48 government colleges to improve accessibility to educational resources.<sup>32</sup>

- iii. In Bihar, data revealed that while 4.05 lakh SC, ST, and girl students were enrolled at the undergraduate level, the figure sharply declined to only 10,870 students at the post graduate level.<sup>33</sup> The state decided to provide free education to Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribe (ST) and girl students till Post-Graduation level.



30. Employment Social Outlook Women: Trends for Women, International Labour Organization, 2018.

31. Tamil Nadu government distributes free laptops to 5 lakh students in 2020-21, The Hindu Business Line, 2020.

32. Punjab and Kerala are best states for girls' education in India, The Youth, 2020.

33. Bihar to provide free education till PG to SC/ST and girl students, The Hindu, 2015

## E2. Capacity-building and skilling initiatives

A host of organizations and companies offer skilling opportunities to facilitate greater participation of women in the workforce. Private sector organizations have also been playing a critical role in developing skills and capacities of the women workforce in urban as well as rural areas. A few examples are provided below:

i. An example of the 'Agents of Change' programme which impacts the livelihoods of women has been provided below.

One of India's leading FMCG and hotel group facilitates **micro-credit and skill training** to generate **alternate employment opportunities**. Increased remuneration in the hands of rural women means improved nutrition, health care and education for their children. Launched in collaboration with various Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), the program has helped create sustainable livelihoods for over **62,300 rural women** either through micro-enterprises or assistance via loans to pursue income generating activities.



ii. A multinational technology company has helped women push the envelope by launching their up-skilling initiative, as explained below.

### Exhibit 4: Upskilling Programme

A multinational tech-based company has launched a **22-week virtual upskilling learning engagement** to teach **digital marketing and leadership skills to women** from all intersectionalities including those with disabilities and those from the LGBTQ+ community. The organization realized that successful career re-entries/pivots often require upgraded strategic as well as technical skills. Programmes such as these provide a stable **platform for women to emerge as tomorrow's leaders** and gives them equitable access to job opportunities.



iii. An initiative launched by one of India's multinational conglomerate manufacturers of automobiles and other products facilitates the enrolment, education, and skilling of girls from economically deprived areas to enable them to be part of the manufacturing units and assembly lines of various products, including small passenger cars.

iv. A California-based software firm<sup>34</sup> in India has initiated an upskilling program in 2018 that allows women, who took mid-career breaks for personal reasons, to return to the

workforce. A majority of the 5000 women who re-joined work through the initiative had a career break of five to seven years.

v. Several companies have initiated networking forums such as 'Vaahini' and 'She Will Connect' to help professional women connect and learn from one another. One of India's leading IT firms helps women access quality education in the healthcare industry and has initiated a venture for the same.<sup>35</sup>

vi. One of India's multinational conglomerates offers a platform<sup>36</sup> to

women who are transitioning back into their careers after a break. Such women employees are offered a stipend and inducted into a two-to-three day long orientation programme and given flexible options, such as part time or full-time opportunities, to choose from that could fulfil the company's short term as well as long term talent requirements. Other leading IT firms, tech firms, and leading Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) firms too offer a re-entry programme for women software engineers to solve the talent shortage problem.<sup>37</sup>

34. 'Taara' brings over 7000 women back to work, The Hindu, Mini Tejaswi, September 2020.

35. Top 10 Companies for Indian Women in the Workplace, Naare, 2019.

36. Career break? How to make a smooth comeback, Business Line, 2018.

37. All the returning women's programmes by tech firms in India, Analytics India, 2021.

### E3. Making the workplace more conducive for women

Indian firms<sup>38</sup> are taking several other steps to ensure inclusion and promote the employment of more women. Company-paid maternity and paternity leaves of up to 26 weeks are being offered to employees.

Firms also provide their employees access to a variety of resources such as subsidized childcare services, parenting workshops, employee assistance programs, and pre- and post-maternity counselling sessions.<sup>39</sup> Leading tech companies<sup>40,41,42</sup> are taking steps to skill women, provide flexible work hours, and ensure the availability of creche and maternity benefits for all. Tech companies have also curated skilling programmes exclusively for women to ensure capacity building.

Some Indian firms, such as one of India's largest FMCG companies,

have gone a step ahead and rolled out policies to support employees who are victims of domestic abuse by providing access to urgent medical and psychological care along with ten days of paid leave.<sup>43</sup>

One of India's multilateral information technology companies has also set up a dedicated office for gender sensitivity where women employees can avail counselling facilities and nursing stations that would be available round the clock<sup>44</sup>. Other IT companies<sup>45</sup> have followed suit and have built lactation rooms, college coaching, as well as test preparation services to support their employees.

Further, a bank which has a pan-India presence has also initiated measures to retain new mothers by allowing women employees to work from home for a year<sup>46</sup>.



### E4. Working in the COVID-19 crisis

The Government of India also undertook targeted initiatives for supporting women during the COVID-19 pandemic by developing facilities, establishing dedicated women helplines and emergency response systems to mitigate the risk of increasing mental health challenges for women.

In rural India, where the health infrastructure is weak, women health workers were at the front-line of the COVID-19 response.

In conclusion, while there is a lot of progress to be made to see improvements in India's FLFPR, some private sector companies have employed unique methods and interventions to challenge the status quo and promote equality and inclusion in the workplace.

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Leveraging **Jan Aushadi Kendra (JAK)** for providing **40 women centric products** during lockdowns due to the COVID-19 pandemic

Leveraging an ecosystem of **6,318 JAKs** available in India, a list of 40 women centric products was made available to citizens through these centres during lockdowns. The products included essential items such as subsidized sanitary pads, iron folic acid, calcium, and other critical medicinal pills, required by women and girls on a day to day basis.

During COVID-19, **Anganwadi workers, helpers, and women from Self-Help Groups (SHGs)** have been producing and distributing more than **60,000 masks** to **frontline workers and rural households** across the country. Additionally, essential items such as gloves and sanitizers have also been distributed by women frontline workers. Anganwadi workers are also leveraging technology to ensure early childhood education of children is not disturbed. Women in Gujarat and Tamil Nadu are using camera enabled platforms and video series to facilitate the continuation of early childhood education amidst the lockdown.



# F Recommendations

A multi-pronged approach with gender focused interventions needs to be adopted to bring more women to work, close the gender gap, make workspaces more women friendly, and create a sustainable and convergent action plan for synergies with the private sector. Some of the key recommendations are as follows:

## 1. Behaviour Change for bringing more women to the workforce

### Short to Medium term recommendations

Launch comprehensive and pan-India Information, Education and Communication (IEC) campaigns to motivate more women to enter the labour market and:

- i. Remove barriers for women to access employment or livelihoods due to prevalent societal norms
- ii. Instil respect for women and generate awareness on gender sensitivity from a young age in boys and girls
- iii. Showcase real life examples of successful working women and how a supporting family has helped them to make this journey easier
- iv. Create awareness on government and private sector policies/ initiatives supporting women's participation in the workforce.

The Private Sector to launch Social Media Campaigns in sync with the efforts of Government to bring about behaviour change and breaking the entry barriers for women to work.

## 2. Collection of gender disaggregated data and use for programming

### Short Term Measures

The upcoming National Census (2021/22) could provide a large opportunity to collect and process gender disaggregated data at a pan-India level, even for parameters that are not available in legacy database/surveys in India.

### Medium term recommendations

Collection of gender disaggregated data needs to be mandated at least across all Government schemes and interventions

- Gender disaggregated evidence would allow all stakeholders, including all levels of the Government apart from enabling better planning of initiatives and schemes for gender focused outcomes and outputs

### Example on importance of collection of gender disaggregated data in India

1. A survey conducted by National Statistical Office (NSO) in 2019, indicated that women spend almost five hours every day on unpaid domestic services for household members, as compared to men who spend 98 minutes.
2. A study on Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY) by National Health Authority in 2020 states "Out of total 50 top procedures from top 10 specialties (excluding obstetrics and gynaecology as they are utilised by females only), percentage utilisation is higher for males in 60 percent procedures, and 32 percent procedures are utilised more by females"

### 3. Making women more employable and linking jobs to skill training

#### Short Term Measures

A pan India survey may be undertaken by government to capture the current and predicted skill shortage – geography and industry wise. This survey will help in:

- i. Initiating location specific training programmes for women to cater to location specific skill shortages – this will also help women who have limited flexibility to migrate to other regions for work
- ii. Initiating industry specific trainings as per requirements.

#### Medium term recommendations

- i. A dynamic repository of all trainees should be maintained with data like background, aptitude (test to be conducted for profiling purpose), and interest/competencies of the trainees
- ii. Collaboration with private sector can be explored for placements of the women trained in Government skilling programmes. Government departments can also be asked to fulfil their requirements of contractual employees through the pool of trainees created through government skilling programmes

### 4. Scaling up the availability of affordable Crèches and Working Women's Hostels (WWHs) to provide enhanced flexibility and freedom for women in both formal and informal sectors

#### Medium term recommendations

- i. Childcare centres, like Anganwadi Centres for early childcare, can be made to function as a Crèche both in urban and rural areas. Similar linkage needs to be provided for older/ school going children, especially for beneficiaries in working women hostels, to make the working ecosystem more conducive to women.
- ii. Similarly, adequate availability and affordable of crèches and WWHs will also facilitate the growth of female labour force in urban areas.
- iii. The convergence between crèches and working women hostels should also be an essential focus area for any policy intervention for increasing the FLFPR in urban areas.

The following features would promote the appeal of Working Women Hostels:

- i. Ensuring sufficient number of WWHs in a district and at least one in each cluster of economic activity (SEZs, mobile crèches for construction areas etc.).
- ii. Lowering the salary limit for admission eligibility into hostels
- iii. Increasing the tenure of stay
- iv. Increasing the age limit for boy child to stay in hostel
- v. Night crèches in WWHs to enable night shifts of women
- vi. Public-Private Participation and use of CSR funding to increase number of WWHs and crèches



## Promoting political empowerment and strengthening workplace systems to enable participation

Medium to long term recommendations

- i. Overall, there is a need for greater political participation of women for providing a major fillip to women empowerment initiatives in addition to the recommendations. This can be done at a pan-India level through the passage and enactment of a women reservation bill for parliament and state assemblies.
- ii. Focused interventions are required to strengthen anti-discrimination laws and to make workspaces women friendly.
  - a. **Wage transparency:** Although Article 39(d) of Directive Principles of State Policy mandates equal pay for equal work for both men and women, it may be strengthened on the lines of the Pay Transparency Act in the European Union, through an enforcement mechanism, that ensures equal pay for women and men for the same work and that also makes pay structures more transparent.
  - b. **Gender neutral job evaluations:** Along with measures such as to ensure that the evaluation of all candidates is based on similar questions and parameters, firms may be asked to introduce unconscious bias training for enhancing the diversity and inclusion in a firm.
  - c. **Strengthening workplace infrastructure:** Measures such as a strong harassment and discrimination complaints mechanism within the firm, subsidized creche facilities etc. should be promoted in India.
  - d. **Provision of flexible work opportunities:** Promote organizations to realign work practices around flexible work hours
- iii. Incorporate a gender lens while drafting all policies and taking proactive measures to mitigate any inadvertent consequences of bias against women during implementation.

## Measures to promote Agency for Women

Medium to long term recommendations

- i. Enhancing primary and secondary school enrolment for women and achieving gender equality in enrolment, while integrating gender quality principles into the core values of the schooling system
  - ii. There is a need for strengthening land rights that support women's agency, through improved governance and progressive legal reforms. Simultaneously, it is also critical to sensitise and raise awareness on land rights for women to creating an enabling environment for policy implementation
  - iii. There is a need for reforms to strengthen the data management landscape to promote women's agency.
- a. **Data integration:** Quantitative data need to be complemented by qualitative information to accurately capture levels of agency and changes over time
  - b. **Rigorous monitoring and evaluation:** At the operational level, there is a need to establish baselines, report regular progress and conduct evaluation studies to assess the programmatic outcomes
  - c. **Development of indices:** Similar to the Gender Equality Index, development of new composite indices to converge data sources from multiple institutions, collecting data on women's economic empowerment is required.

For this, the following measures are recommended to be undertaken.

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