



Protection of Women Labour: An International Perspective

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Abstract: The protection of women in the workforce is a critical element in achieving gender equality and promoting fair labor practices worldwide. This paper explores the multifaceted approach toward the protection of women labor within an international context, focusing on the frameworks, conventions, and practices established by global organizations such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) and United Nations (UN). Through comparative analysis, this study examines policies implemented in various countries, highlighting best practices, challenges, and gaps. The aim is to present an integrative approach toward strengthening policies that support women's rights and safety in labor, especially in vulnerable sectors.

Keywords: Women labor protection, gender equality, International Labour Organization, labor rights, women workforce

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INTRODUCTION

Women's labor rights have been a focal point of international discourse for decades, recognizing their unique challenges in the workforce and the need for specific protections. The discrimination and inequities faced by women laborers affect their economic empowerment and social well-being, impacting communities and national economies. Given the prominence of these issues, international organizations have developed treaties, conventions, and frameworks to create a fairer, more inclusive labor environment.

This paper delves into the international perspective on protecting women in the labor force, examining both universal standards and country-specific applications, with a particular focus on industries that present heightened risk, such as agriculture, manufacturing, and domestic work.

METHODOLOGY

This study is structured as a qualitative, comparative analysis to explore the global perspective on women's labor protections. It investigates existing policies and frameworks from an international lens, assessing both developed and developing countries, particularly in vulnerable sectors such as agriculture, domestic work, and manufacturing. By examining various international conventions, country-specific laws, and their implementation, the study highlights disparities, challenges, and effective practices in gender-based labor protection.

RESULTS

The most current PLFS data shows that women of working age were in the labour force at 32.8% in 2021–

22, up 9.5% from 23.3% in 2017–18. The rural sector led the way with a growth of 12.0 percent while the urban sector trailed behind with a growth of 3.4 percent. In 2017–18, 24.6% of rural women engaged in LFPR; in 2021–22, that number increased to 36.6%, a 12.0% increase. The opposite was true in rural areas, where female participation was much lower than in urban centres. The female LFPR in urban areas increased by 3.4% between 2017 and 2018, going from 20.4% to 23.8% in 2021 and 2022.

As indicated in Figures 1, 2, and 3 of the Annual PLFS Report, the Female Labour Force Participation Rate for age 15 years & above at normal status for 2021-22 are.

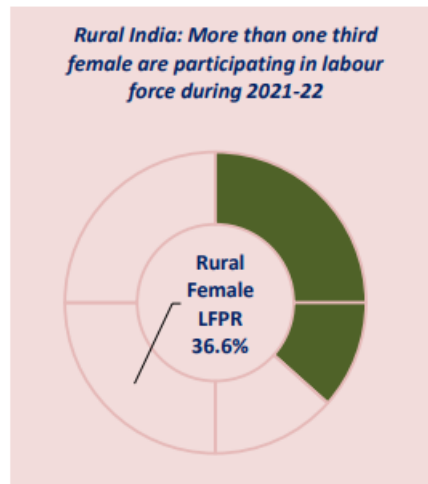


Figure 1: 36.6% of female aged 15 years & above in Rural areas are participating in labour force, as against 78.2% male. [1]

Among rural residents aged 15–59, 82.1% are male and 39.3% are female LFPR. People aged 15 and above have an overall LFPR of 57.5% in rural regions, while those aged 15 to 59 have an LFPR of 60.8%.

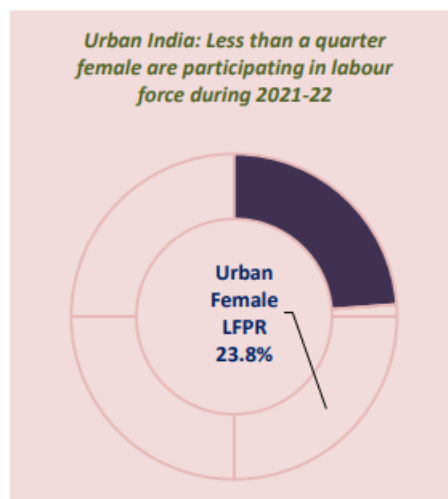


Figure 2: 23.8% of female aged 15 years & above in Urban areas are participating in labour force, as against 74.7% male.[2]

In urban regions, 81.2% of LFPRs are male, while 26.5% are female, and the age range is 15–59. The

overall LFPR in urban areas is 49.7% for those aged 15 and above, and 54.5% for those aged 15 to 59.



Figure 3: 32.8% of female aged 15 years & above in India are participating in labour force, as against 77.2% male. [3]

A number of variables influence women's labour force participation, including but not limited to: economic development, education levels, fertility rates, availability of childcare and other supporting services, and, finally, societal norms and cultural background. The term "Push and Pull factors" describes the interplay between these elements and the employment rates of women. Despite the fact that more women are entering the workforce as a consequence of fast economic development, higher education, and falling childbearing rates, they still encounter obstacles while trying to advance their careers. According to the World Bank report "Reshaping Norms: A New Way Forward," rising incomes and economic growth have not been enough to close the region's persistently large gender disparity in a variety of areas. Gender norms in society are one of the main things standing in the way of gender equality. The main causes that kept women out of the workforce are outlined in this section. Here, we take a look at the data to see what the main things are that prevent women from joining the workforce. The following details the percentage distribution of men and women who are not in the labour force by the primary causes, as captured by the periodic labour force surveys, as reported in the PLFS 2021-22: [4]

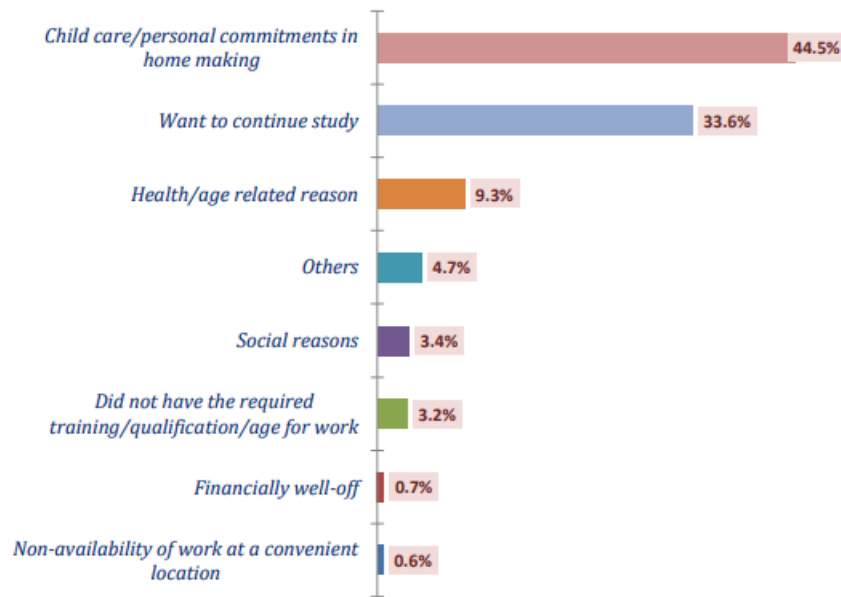


Figure 4: Reasons reported by females (in %) for not being in labour force [5]

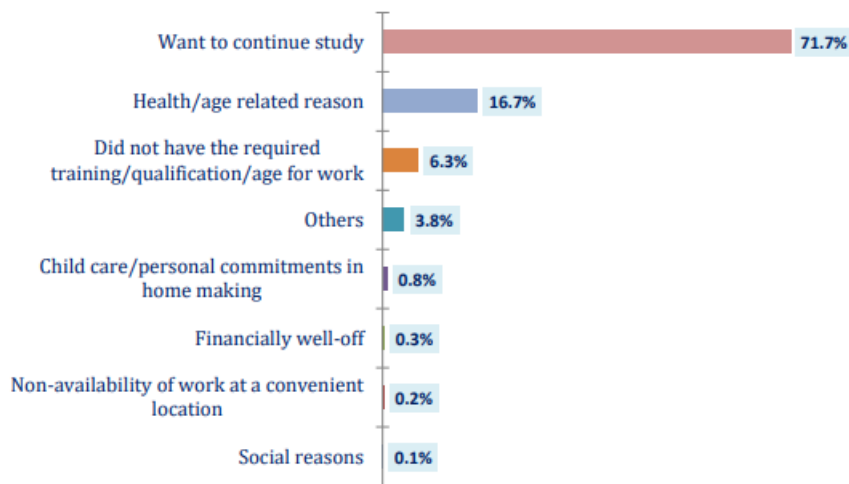


Figure 5: Reasons reported by male (in %) for not being in labour force [6]

From the statistics shown above, it is clear that out of all the women who are not in the labour market, around 44.5% cite "Child care/personal commitments in home making" as the reason they are not, while 33.6% say they would rather finish their education than work. For "social reasons," around 3.4% of women did not participate in the labour market.[7]

The barriers that women experience in entering the workforce are different from those that males encounter. Men stayed in school longer than women because they wanted to further their education. As a result of their desire to remain in school, almost 71.7% of males do not participate in the employment market. [8]

From this, it is clear that women do the bulk of the housework, including caring for children and other family members and participating in non-market activities that provide financial advantages to homes. Gender norms contribute to the predicament of women being expected to do more housework or fulfil more

domestic responsibilities due to their multifaceted roles in the family. This kind of effort goes unnoticed, unappreciated, and unreported. Accordingly, low female LFP measurement is an additional critical area.

What constitutes acceptable and proper behaviour and attitude in any particular social setting is defined by a set of informal, unwritten standards called social norms. There is a "Male Breadwinner norm" that holds men financially responsible for the house and its upkeep, and a "Female Homemaker norm" that holds women responsible for raising children and maintaining the home. As a result, "time poverty" is the dominant societal norm for married women. Because of the unfair care economy, women still choose not to work, even when they have the education and legal right to do so.

That is why the low rate of female labour force participation in India may be explained by the following interrelated fundamental factors:

- a. Unpaid domestic duties/Unpaid care work
- b. Pervasiveness of various gender biased social norms
- c. Rising household income which works as disincentive for female participation in labour market
- d. Salary/Wage Disparity

Further, education is one of the most important factors that influence the female labour force participation. The educational attainment has an important effect on an individual's decision to participate in the labour market. There are many theories that underline the importance of education in employment outcomes. The theories also reveal that greater educational attainment leads to higher participation in the labour force and also increased productivity. Section IX describes the impact of education level on female participation in labour force and workforce.

The percentage distribution of male and female regular wage/salaried employees by terms of employment in usual status (ps+ss) engaged in non-agriculture sector is given in Table 5. These unfavourable terms of employment also coerce females to step back from the employment.

Table 1: Percentage of regular wage/salaried employees by terms of employment [9]

Terms of Employment	2017-18	2021-22
Female		
Had no written job contract	66.8	59.1
Not eligible for paid leave	50.4	44.6
Not eligible for any social security benefit	51.8	55.7
Not eligible for paid leave, without written job contract and without any social security benefits	35.0	35.1
Male		
Had no written job contract	72.3	62.9
Not eligible for paid leave	55.2	50.5
Not eligible for any social security benefit	49.0	52.2
Not eligible for paid leave, without written job contract and without any social security benefits	38.8	39.6

It is evident from the data in the above table that around half of the female regular wage/salaried employees were not eligible for the paid leave, which includes leave during sickness, maternity or such leave as an

employee was eligible to take without loss of pay, as per the conditions of employment.[10]

CONCLUSION

International efforts to protect women laborers have evolved significantly, yet disparities persist due to socioeconomic, cultural, and structural challenges. A concerted effort by governments, international organizations, and civil society is essential to create equitable and safe labor conditions for women worldwide. By building on best practices and addressing persistent gaps, we can progress toward a labor environment that honors the dignity, rights, and contributions of women across all sectors.

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