

Women Workforce Participation

What is the issue?

- A key focus of many political parties in the election time has been women's employment.
- In this context, more than a 'more jobs' approach, addressing structural issues which keep women away from the workforce is a must.

How is women workforce participation?

- Currently, the participation of women in the workforce in India is one of the lowest globally.
- The female labour force participation rate (LFPR) in India fell from around 31% in 2011-2012 to close to 23% in 2017-2018.
- This decline has been sharper in rural areas, where the female LFPR fell by more than 11 percentage points.

What are the factors behind?

- The limitations to participation in work arise from a complex set of factors including -
 - i. low social acceptability of women working outside the household
 - ii. lack of access to safe and secure workspaces
 - iii. widespread prevalence of poor and unequal wages
 - iv. dearth of decent and suitable jobs
- So most women in India are engaged in subsistence-level work in agriculture in rural areas.
- In urban areas, it is the low-paying jobs such as domestic service and petty home-based manufacturing.

How does education-work interconnection work?

- Studies reveal a strong negative relationship between a woman's education level and her participation in agricultural and non-agricultural wage work and in family farms.
- With better education, women are refusing to do casual wage labour or work in family farms and enterprises.
- There is also a preference among women for salaried jobs as their

educational attainment increases.

- But the challenge is that such jobs remain extremely limited for women.
- E.g. Among people (25 to 59 years) working as farmers, farm labourers and service workers, nearly a third are women.
- On the other hand, proportion of women among professionals, managers and clerical workers is only about 15%.

Why does women's work go unnoticed?

- It is not that women are simply retreating from the world of work.
- In contrast, they devote their substantial time to work which is not considered as work, but an extension of their duties, and is hence largely unpaid.
- This includes unpaid care work such as childcare, elderly care, and household work such as collecting water.
- This burden falls disproportionately on women, especially due to inadequate availability and accessibility of public services.
- It also encompasses significant chunks of women's contribution to agriculture, animal husbandry, and non-timber forest produce.

What should the policy approach be?

- Efforts at women's economic empowerment and equal access to livelihoods must address the above challenges.
- The limitations exist along a highly gendered continuum of unpaid, underpaid and paid work.
- So on the one hand, the measure should -
 - i. facilitate women's access to decent work by providing public services
 - ii. eliminate discrimination in hiring
 - iii. ensure equal and decent wages
 - iv. improve women's security in public spaces
- On the other hand, it must also recognise, reduce, redistribute, and remunerate women's unpaid work.
- In this context, gender-responsive public services include
 - i. free and accessible public toilets
 - ii. household water connections
 - iii. safe and secure public transport
 - iv. adequate lighting and CCTV cameras to prevent violence against women in public spaces
- Furthermore, fair and decent living wages and social security such as maternity and sickness benefits, provident fund, pension should be the

priorities.

- Besides, policies should address the specific needs of migrant workers, dalits, tribals, Muslims, and other marginalised communities.
- E.g. migration facilitation and crisis centres (temporary shelter facility, helpline, legal aid, and medical and counselling facilities)
- Others include social housing spaces for women workers, spaces for women shopkeepers and hawkers in markets and vending zones.
- Besides these, recognising women as farmers in accordance with the National Policy for Farmers is a crucial priority.
- Their equal rights and entitlements over land, and access to inputs, credit, markets, and extension services must be ensured. Click [here](#) to know more on women in agriculture.
- In all, the need is to address the structural issues which keep women from entering and staying in the workforce.

Source: The Hindu

