

# **Regional Consultation on Female Labour Force Participation in India**

**organised by**

**National Commission for Women**

**in collaboration with V.V.Giri National Labour Institute**

## **Concept Note**

The Report of World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends for Women of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), 2018 reported that gender gaps between men and women in the world of work remain as one of the most pressing labour market challenges facing the global community with women's limited access to the labour market. The global commitments on Sustainable Development Goals, Goal 5 aims to 'Achieve Gender Equality and Empower all Women and Girls' and has set different targets ensuring economic empowerment and well-being of women. Globally, 48.5 percent women participate in the labour market in comparison and 75.0 percent men i.e 26.5 percentage points below that of men. The gaps were widest in the Arab States, Northern Africa and Southern Asia where they exceed 50 percentage points and had the lowest levels of female labour force participation rates i.e less than 30 percent as compared to the global average of 49 percent (ILO, 2018)<sup>1</sup>.

Within the South Asian context, India has witnessed a decline in the female labour force participation (LFP) which has been a matter of serious concern or policy makers, planners, gender advocates and scholars working in this area. The female LFP was recorded as 34.1 per cent in 1999-00 which declined to 27.2 per cent in 2011-12 as per the National Sample Survey Organisation. The recently released Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) for 2017-18 reported a further decline in female labour force participation in usual status (ps+ss) in 15 years and above age group which was 23.3 percent for females while for males it was 75.8 percent. In rural areas female labour force participation in this age group was 24.6 percent while for males it was 76.4 percent. In urban areas, LFP was 20.4 percent for females and 74.5 percent for males. In rural areas nearly one-fourth of the females of age 15 years and above were in the labour force while in among urban females of age 15 years

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<sup>1</sup> ILO, International Labour Organisation (2018), World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends for Women, International Labour Office: Geneva

and above, nearly one-fifth were in the labour force (GoI,2019)<sup>2</sup>. While on one hand, the employment trends for women in India have been discouraging, on the other hand, women's participation in domestic duties has increased which is again an important area of concern. According to a recent report of the National Sample Survey Organisation on 'Participation of Women in Specified Activities Alongwith Domestic Duties' 2014, the domestic duties participation for women in rural areas has increased from 53.4 percent in 2004-2005 to 61.6 in 2011-12. While in urban areas it has remained constant at 65.0 percent (GoI, 2014)<sup>3</sup>. Further, time-use surveys of 26 OECD countries and three OECD enhanced engagement countries (China, India and South Africa) show that women devote, on average, more than twice as much time to household work as men (OECD 2012)<sup>4</sup>.

Though various arguments have been put forth (including increasing educational attainment, increase in household level incomes etc) for decreasing numbers of women in labour force, yet no consensus has been achieved. It has been pointed out that an increasing number of women in rural areas are pursuing higher education, which has led to their decreasing numbers in the workforce (Chowdhury 2011; Rangarajan et al. 2011; Thomas 2012)<sup>5</sup>. Neff et al. argue that an increased number of rural women pursuing higher education might lead not only to a temporary decline in their labour force participation (LFP) but could also lead to underemployment and perhaps also a permanent decline in their LFP rates in the long term. Wages, particularly, for lower income groups appear to have increased leading to an increase in household income and withdrawal of women from paid work (Neff et al. 2012)<sup>6</sup>. Yet, an increase in income needs to be looked at in conjunction with social and cultural factors. The new manufacturing jobs available, unlike farm work are incompatible with domestic duties and existing social stigmas about women moving out for paid employment. Combined with a negative effect of rising income of male family members, female participation declines (Pieters and

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<sup>2</sup> Government of India,GOI (2019),Periodic Labour Force Survey (July 2017-June 2018),Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation :New Delhi

<sup>3</sup> Government of India,GOI (2014), Report of Participation of Women in Specified Activities along with Domestic Duties, 68th round July 2011- June 2012, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India :NewDelhi.

<sup>4</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), (2012), *Closing the Gender Gap: Act Now*, OECD Publishing, European Union.

<sup>5</sup> Chowdhury, Subhanil (2011), 'Employment in India: What Does the Latest Data Show?' *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 46, No. 32. pp 23-26. Rangarajan, C, Padma Iyer Kaul and Seema, (2011), "Where is the Missing Labour Force?" *Economic&Political Weekly*, Vol. XLVI, No. 39. Thomas, Jayan Jose, (2012), "India's Labour Market During 2000s", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 47, No. 51, pp.29-31.

<sup>6</sup> Neff Daniel, Kunal Sen and Veronika King (2012), 'The Puzzling Decline in Rural Women's Labour Force Participation in India: A Re-examination,' Working Paper, GIGA Research Unit: Institute of Asian Studies, May 2012, No. 196, pp. 1-29.

Klasen 2013)<sup>7</sup>. There is no denying the fact that FLFP rates are analysed through both demand and supply side factors which makes it quite challenging for designing appropriate policy responses. From the demand side, women face certain legal, normative, and economic constraints to work. Gender based discrimination in hiring, gender pay gap etc continue to exist in many sectors. Jobless growth in sectors that employ more women or seem friendlier to women necessarily limits growth in FLFP. On the supply side, Indian household often require that women prioritize housework and may explicitly constrain work by married women (Fletcher et al, 2017)<sup>8</sup>. Women's normative responsibilities of child care and domestic work and restrictions imposed on their movement and employment outside the house affect their participation in paid employment. It is also noted that the proportion of women involved in unpaid domestic and care work is higher in urban areas and among the better educated groups of women who may face less social constraints on their participation in paid employment (Thomas 2012).

Apart from the above factors, recent research in the area of female labour force participation, rightly acknowledges that gender-based violence, both at home and at the workplace, respect for safety, rights and dignity of women have an impact on FLFP. Also, gender pay gap, rigid socio-cultural norms, marriage, pregnancy, child birth, child care and other care responsibilities, transition from informal to formal sector and the specific scenarios prevailing in these sectors, lack of adequate legal protection etc often interferes with women's choice of paid employment and overall well-being. These inter-linkages need to be explored vis a vis woman in science, technology, engineering and medical (STEM) fields and in position of higher responsibility through indepth investigation, discussions and consultations with various stakeholders.

Apart from gender inequalities as seen in women's concentration in certain industries and sectors of the economy, the devaluation of their contribution as unpaid workers has persisted. All of women's work in the domestic sphere is excluded from the realm of economic activity and not reflected in the work force participation rate (Samantray and Khurana 2015)<sup>9</sup>. The non-recognition of unpaid care statistics is reflected in various studies on missing labour force conducted in India (Hirway 2012; Hirway and Jose 2011; Jain 2008)<sup>10</sup>. Women

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<sup>7</sup> Klasen S and Pieters J(2013), What Explains the Stagnation of Female Labour Force Participation in Urban India ,IZA Discussion Paper No 7597:Germany

<sup>8</sup> Fletcher et al (2017), Women and Work in India: descriptive Evidence and a Review of Potential Policies, CID Faculty Working Paper No 339, Centre for International Development ,Harvard University.

<sup>9</sup> Samantroy, Ellina and Sakshi Khurana (2015). Capturing Unpaid Work: Labour Statistics and Time Use Pattern Panda U.K (eds.), *Gender Issues and Challenges in Twenty First Century*, Satyam Law International, New Delhi.

<sup>10</sup> Hirway, I., (2012), 'Missing Labour Force, An Explanation', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.47, No.37, pp. 72-67.

tend to spend more time on housework and other care responsibilities across cultures. It is evident that the increasing burden of domestic duties often discourages women to participate in full time paid employment. Women are more likely than men to multitask in the domestic sphere because men have not increased enough of their share of housework and childcare following women's entry into paid work, leaving it to women to manage responsibilities in both spheres (Samantroy, 2017)<sup>11</sup>.

However, the major challenge in India is the expanding informal economy and the concentration of women in the informal sector. Further, the non-market economic activities performed by women within the households are usually not recorded and the contribution of women within the household is undercounted in National Accounts Statistics. Lack of recognition of women's work in statistical sources, additional burdens of women's unpaid responsibilities and social and cultural practices constraints them from accessing social protection and social security provisions available in the country. The recent report of the ILO on Care Work and Care Jobs: The Future of Decent Work (2018) emphasized that unpaid care work is crucial to the future of decent work, particularly in countries that experience low labour market participation of women and women's secondary status in the labour markets. It was reported that women spend 4.1 times more in unpaid care work than men in the Asia Pacific Region (4 hours and 25 minutes) per day while men spend only 1 hour and 4 minutes (ILO, 2018). Though questions of unpaid and care work have received greater attention in policy agendas of developed nations, yet, such questions also need to be addressed in the context of developing countries where women are often engaged in vulnerable employment and lack decent working opportunities.

In this background, the National Commission for Women in collaboration with the V.V.Giri National Labour Institute has proposed to conduct five regional consultations on matters relating to working women, especially those in the unorganized sector to understand the factors affecting female labour force participation. The regional consultations will be held in Cuttack, Guwahati, Bengaluru, Gandhinagar and Delhi in collaboration with respective National Law Universities (NLUs).The regional consultations will be deliberating on issues related to women's participation in the labour market and the

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Hirway, I and Jose, S., (2011), 'Understanding Women's Work Using Time Use Statistics: Case of India', *Feminist Economics*, Vol. 17, No. 4, pp. 92-67. Jain, Devaki (2008), 'Integrating Unpaid Work into Macroeconomics: Some Indian Experiences', in Report of the International Seminar on Towards Mainstreaming Time Use Surveys, Vol. XLVII, No. 37, pp. 169-187.

<sup>11</sup> Samantroy, Ellina (2017), 'Understanding Women's Work: Gendered Analysis of Women's Participation in Domestic Duties in North East India', *NLI Research Studies Series No 123*, V.V. Giri National Labour Institute, Noida.

constraints which women face to continue in paid employment. There would be an attempt to understand the relationship between female labour force participation (FLFP) with informality, unpaid care work, gender-based violence including workplace harassment, marriage, socio-cultural norms, social protection, labour regulations etc. The consultations will also bring to light a range of factors with a focus on region specific factors affecting women's paid work and highlight on the necessary policy interventions/action plans that need to undertaken at a regional level for addressing the issues related to declining female labour force participation.

**Objectives**

- To understand employment trends for women in India and factors responsible for declining female LFP.
- To explore the inter-relationship of crimes against women, gender-based violence, workplace harassment, issues of safety, security and dignity of women with FLFP
- To understand the impact of marriage, pregnancy, child birth,child care and other care responsibilities of women on FLFP.
- To understand the issues of women in the unorganized sector and identify the impact of prevailing laws on FLFP.
- To understand the challenges of women in transition from informal to formal sector and the specific scenarios prevailing in these sectors vis a vis women in STEM and in position of higher responsibility.
- To provide a platform for sharing of good practices from national/regional and state-level experiences addressing FLFP.
- To develop a set of recommendations for informing policy and programme to address declining female labour force participation across sectors and identify action plans to counter and mitigate them at the regional level.

**Target Group**

The regional consultation will be bringing together experts and practitioners working on gender and labour issues including scholars from the academia, government (Ministries concerned), State Commissions on Women, international organizations, and other organizations.

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