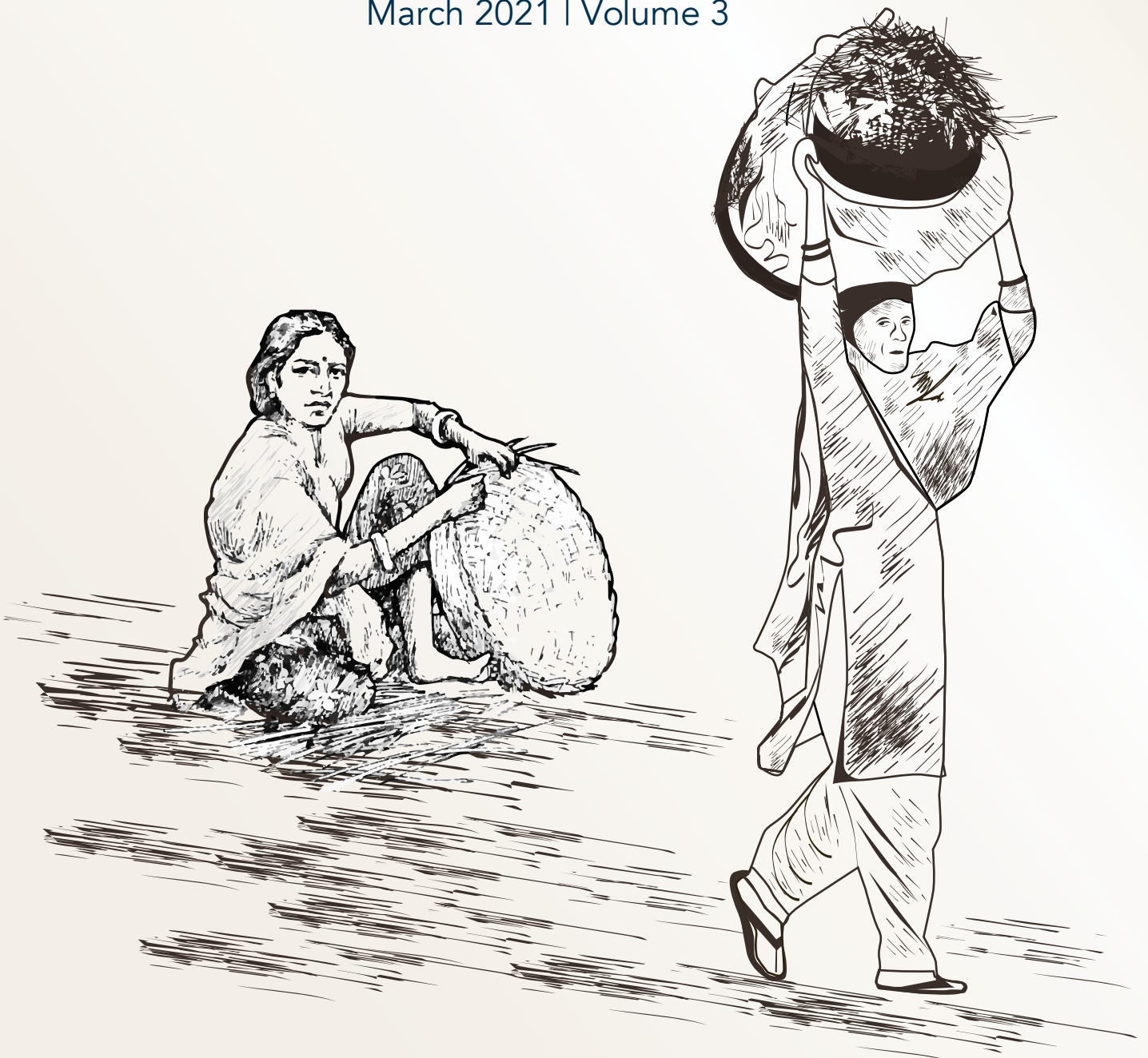


# GENDER IN FOCUS

March 2021 | Volume 3



## ***Dear readers,***

We deeply appreciate the enthusiastic response being given to our quarterly, Gender in Focus. IWWAGE remains committed to being a premier center for advancing gender research and improving the uptake and use of evidence in policymaking in India, and to that end, this quarterly is a mere platform to showcase the work being undertaken by us and our partners.

As 2020 drew to a close, it was time for us to reflect on the year that it was, especially for women. We released in January 2021, a report to highlight trends with regards to women's work and livelihoods that were observed in 2020. The report prepared in collaboration with The Quantum Hub (TQH), summarised succinctly the impact that the pandemic had on Indian women.

Besides working on research that unpacks barriers that women face, and the quality of work they do, IWWAGE also tests potential solutions which can help improve the world of work for women. As part of this quest, IWWAGE is proud to announce a partnership with the University of Bath on a proposal called WorkFREE. As a social experiment, WorkFREE would test the efficacy of unconditional cash transfers and the extent to which they help a community of people working in exploitative occupations (e.g. waste picking). IWWAGE would support the social experiment over the course of the next two and half years conducting ethnographic work, action research, and surveys.

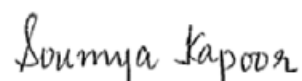
Last year, IWWAGE also forayed into a new area of work – that of gender budgeting. Through our partnership with TQH, we have been releasing our recommendations for the Union Budget and

sending our inputs to several Ministries to advance transformative financing for gender equality. We have also been working on cutting edge policy solutions e.g. a proposal for a gendered Urban Employment Guarantee Scheme (with TQH); evidence on how to provide childcare in a post Covid-19 context (with IDRC); and how women's collectives responded to the pandemic (with the Evidence Consortium on Women's Groups led by the American Institutes for Research and the Population Council). This past quarter has also seen the upscaling of our ambitious pilot on gender resource centers in Madhya Pradesh, in collaboration with our CSO partner Anandi and the Madhya Pradesh State Rural Livelihoods Mission.

Finally, we entered into a new partnership with IndiaSpend, one of the leading data journalism initiatives in the country, to showcase our work, more so in the context of the pandemic, and foster data-led discussion and analysis; through evidence-based ground reports and narratives.

Through all these initiatives, we hope that IWWAGE lives to its promise and potential. We look forward to your continued support. And for inspiration, we look towards the millions of women in India, whose economic empowerment remains our goal.

***With best wishes for the New Year,***



**Soumya Kapoor Mehta,**  
Head, IWWAGE



## Women in work: How India fared in 2020

*A data story on women's livelihoods and work in the year of COVID-19*

Women and girls across the world have been disproportionately affected in the year of the pandemic, not in terms of impact of the virus, but more so socially and economically. While India was rapidly responding to the health crisis, millions of Indians were grappling with the unintended impacts of lockdown measures on the economy and their livelihoods. Even before the onset of COVID-19, India's female workforce was largely invisible, underpaid, under-protected and constituted the largest segment of the informal workforce, which is among the worst-hit this year. But several opportunities exist in 2021 to ensure that India's women are not left behind in its recovery plans.

Against this backdrop, IWWAGE and The Quantum Hub (TQH) authored a report that draws from various studies, data sources and nationally-representative data sets to look at the key trends and policy developments that came to shape and defined the lives of women across India in 2020.

### **Data trends from the year that was for women and work in India are placed below:**

- As per the latest available World Bank data, Female Labour force Participation rate (FLFPR) is only 20.33 per cent in India. While countries like Bangladesh and Pakistan have shown an increase from 24.73 per cent and 13.98 per cent in 1990 to 36.42 per cent and 22.18 per cent in

*"This report captures key data on economic and social indicators (like female labour force participation, barriers to work and livelihoods, financial inclusion, digital access, skilling, education and violence against women) that played a central role in determining women's role in the Indian economy this year."*

2020, India has reported a decline from 30.28 per cent in 1990.

- A study by LEAD at Krea University on the impact of COVID-19 on 1,800 micro-enterprises shows that low sales and reduced customer footfall were reported by 79 per cent of the female entrepreneurs. That being said, there is still some glimmer of hope, with 19 per cent of respondents reporting a scaling up of their businesses during this period.
- There is a 20 per cent gender gap in mobile ownership in India with 79 per cent men owning a mobile as opposed to 63 per cent of women. The gender gap is much wider when it comes to mobile internet users, with 42 per cent of Indian men having access to the internet on mobiles in contrast with 21 per cent of women.

- Women are able to dedicate only 5.8 hours a day on average to their home-based businesses, which is intermittently interrupted by 6.6 hours of unpaid caregiving work. 92 per cent of the women in the age bracket of 15-59 years participate in unpaid domestic activities daily vs only 29 per cent of men.
- A study covering over 2,000 women-led non-farm enterprises that were either micro or small in nature, showed that on average, businesses had reported a 72.5 per cent drop in revenues between pre-COVID-19 and present time, with many enterprises reporting their median revenue in the core lockdown month (April 2020) being nil.

#### What to look out for in 2021:

- **Support for women's collectives and solidarity networks:** There is a need for special emphasis on skilling and training of various women's collectives and enterprises to help them respond better to the various logistical and financial challenges of the pandemic.
- **Investments to reduce unpaid work:** Schemes to ensure access to basic infrastructure for households will indirectly help women in their journey towards economic emancipation. Investments such as crèche facilities and full-service day care centres as proposed in the new labour code and the Maternity Act respectively, can go a long way in helping reduce the burden of unpaid care work on women.
- **Social security for gig and platform economy workers:** The unified database for all migrant and gig platform workers in the informal sectors, being worked on by Labour and Employment Ministry, as well as the recognition of gig work in the new labour codes, is bound to bring more recognition and social security to workers in the gig sector. This will hold the potential for expanding flexible work opportunities for women.
- **Initiatives to improve women's access and ability to use the internet:** Programmes such as PM Wani [government programme for setting up public Wi-Fi networks], Project Kirana [Mastercard, United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Women's Global Development and Prosperity Initiative's (W-GDP) project for improving digital payment adoption of kirana shops that are owned or operated by women] and Saathi Initiative [Tata Trusts and Google's initiative to build a network of community-level trainers to skill other women in their village with digital access] can go a long in reducing the gendered digital divide in the country and help increase economic opportunities for women.
- **Flexible and remote working options for women:** The increased flexibility in terms of work, due to the COVID-19 lockdowns, is expected to bring more women into the workforce, especially those who choose to leave due to increased caregiving responsibilities.
- **Collecting and using gender-disaggregated data:** With increased importance accorded to demographic data in designing policy responses to crises, organisations like UN Women, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and ILO, have issued a clarion call which is likely to fuel governments into focussing more on collecting gender-disaggregated data.

[READ THE REPORT HERE](#)



Photo credit: SEWA

# A gender responsive urban employment guarantee programme for India

## *Ensuring livelihood security in urban areas by making positive impact on development outcomes*

The pandemic and subsequent lockdown measures in India have taken a toll on all aspects of life, particularly on livelihoods. While job losses have been observed in both rural and urban sectors, recent figures show that there has been an increase in creation of non-salaried jobs in rural areas,

but generation of wage employment in the urban sector has remained a challenge.

Over 21 million salaried jobs have been lost in India (out of a base of 86 million overall salaried jobs) between April and August 2020.

As part of its ongoing series of briefs that explore policy solutions to advance gender quality in a post-COVID context,

IWWAGE published a

brief on the importance

of a gender responsive urban employment guarantee scheme.

A survey by the Azim Premji University suggests that urban areas posted a loss in

employment for 8 in 10 workers. Women have lost jobs both in the formal and informal sectors. This is a worrying trend, as female labour force participation rate (FLFPR) in India has witnessed a decline since 1990s. Declining female labour force participation in economies is known to lead to several negative externalities including a reduction in household financial, food and nutrition security, as well as a direct reduction in consumption expenditure of households, thereby creating a drag on the growth of India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which depends largely on consumption expenditure.

Given the dire consequences induced by the pandemic and its severe impacts in urban areas, several policy experts and analysts have opined that this an opportune time for governments to step in and ensure some semblance of livelihood guarantee in urban areas, much like the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) does for rural areas. Several experts, such as Jean Drèze and researchers at Azim Premji University, have developed proposals for an Urban Employment Guarantee Scheme (UEGS)

in India with various design features that account for the differential needs of urban workers.

Recognising such a need for support in urban areas, various state governments, such as Jharkhand, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh have stepped in with their own urban employment guarantee schemes. Apart from these states, Kerala has been implementing the Ayyankali Urban Employment Guarantee Scheme (AUEGS) since 2011.

*The Kerala UEGS ensures livelihood security in urban areas by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work.*

The scheme has had several positive impacts on women's livelihoods and key development outcomes.

However, such a proposed scheme must be responsive to the gendered needs of women in urban areas. The nature of jobs provided under the scheme should be acceptable as

much to women as to men. Proximity to the workplace is a critical factor for women in urban areas in deciding whether to take up a job. An urban employment guarantee scheme would benefit women more if safety concerns in urban spaces are addressed concurrently. Equal wages as those promised to men is one of the key reasons that attracts women workers to MGNREGS works in rural areas. This equality must also be maintained in any urban employment guarantee programme across jobs. Experts have suggested including elements of a gig economy model in the UEGS, giving flexibility to women to work certain number of days per week or getting remunerated for the number of jobs done rather than being paid on a per day basis. Another reason cited for high participation of women in MGNREGA in rural areas is availability of worksite facilities such as crèches, potable drinking water, first-aid services, shade facilities, toilets etc., which should also be available under an urban employment scheme.

An Urban Employment Guarantee Scheme that draws on the experience of other states in India and from global contexts, can help address the growing concerns around declining FLFPR and increase employment opportunities for urban women if it applies a gender lens from the outset.

## Crimes against women and girls as a barrier to work

### *Crimes that impact women's participation in the workforce*

Over the last two decades, the Indian economy has more than doubled in size and the number of working-age women has grown by a quarter. However, the overall number of women in jobs has declined by ten million. Recent estimates suggest that women in India are less likely to be employed than in other G20 countries, next only to Saudi Arabia.<sup>1</sup> As more women are pursuing higher education they are less likely to join the workforce. This paradox merits attention and greater analysis.

*There is consensus that the fall in women's labour force participation rate can be attributed to factors like availability of childcare, occupational segregations, infrastructure, safety and mobility, and social identities.*

<sup>1</sup> Satyam, N. and Pickup, F. To reverse decline of women in labour force, India must make its working spaces safe, The Wire, 2 Dec 2018.

IWWAGE is undertaking a state-level study to determine how lack of safety is a barrier to work for women and girls, and to what extent have crimes against women and girls (CaW&G) contributed to the sharp decline in female labour force participation rate (FLFPR) from 31.2 per cent in 2011 to 23.3 per cent in 2017.

The study looks at data published on crime in India by the National Crime Records Bureau, selecting specific types of crime that are widely acknowledged as barriers to working or preventing women from stepping out to work. Surprisingly, the data paint a strong perception of the lack of safety - consistently from 2011 to 2017. We identified four crimes that are comparable across years- rape, kidnapping and abduction (K&A), sexual harassment and molestation – and refer to these as ‘crimes as barriers to work’ (CaB2W).

In this period, while the all-India FLFPR saw an eight-percentage point decline, the overall rate of CaW&G more than tripled to 57.9 per cent (Table 1). An initial snapshot suggests that, in 2011, the four crimes listed under CaB2W accounted for almost half (48.7 per cent) of all crimes against women and girls, and this share increased to 53.5 per cent in 2017.

If one were to break down CaB2W, at an all-India level, there has been an increase of more than three times in the rate of kidnapping and abduction and sexual harassment between 2011 and 2017. The incidence of rape has also risen from two per cent to 5.2 per cent, and the rate of molestation (which account for a majority of CaB2W at the all-India level) has nearly doubled.

**Table 1: All-India Rate of crimes against women & girls (in percent)**

Crime	2011-12	2017-18
Overall crime rate	18.89	57.9
Rape	2	5.2
Kidnapping & Abduction	2.9	10.69
Sexual harassment	3.6	13.8
Molestation	0.7	1.2

We also find a low but negative correlation between FLFPR and overall crime rate, suggesting that as the crime rate in a state increases, FLFPR decreases. This correlation has become stronger from 2011 to 2017, implying that a higher crime rate is

increasingly a factor that discourages women from participating in the workforce. There is also a moderately negative correlation between FLFPR and kidnapping and abduction, which strengthened between 2011 and 2017.

**Table 2: Correlations- FLFPR and crimes against women & girls**

Crime	FLFPR 2011-12	FLFPR 2017-18
Overall crime rate	-0.002	-0.098
Rape	0.295	0.147
Kidnapping & Abduction	-0.294	-0.309
Sexual harassment	0.343	0.036
Molestation	0.058	0.291

The all-India assessment suggests that kidnapping and abduction, which is indicative of the general lack of safety of women, can be considered to be a strong factor that discourages women from participating in the workforce. This in turn strengthens the hypothesis that crimes against women and girls impact societal perceptions around

safety, in turn demotivating women to step out of their homes. Our upcoming detailed report will present a detailed state-level analysis for each crime identified as a potential barrier to women's work for the years of 2011 and 2017, and suggest a framework to prevent CaW&G in the society.



Photo credit: SEWA



## Gender integration initiatives under livelihoods mission

### ***Enhancing social equality by empowering women's collectives***

The Madhya Pradesh State Rural Livelihood Mission (MPSRLM) was established with the motive to enhance social equality by empowering women's self-help groups (SHG) collectives. The Gender Justice Programme (GJP) was adopted to take this endeavour forward, under which the key strategies included gender training and the establishment of Gender Justice Centres (also known as Lok Adhikar Kendras). The GJP, first piloted in the district of Sheopur by Anandi under the Strengthening Women's institutions for Agency and Empowerment (SWAYAM) project, saw huge success and resulted in plans of expansion and up-scale to 17 other districts in Madhya Pradesh. Supported by IWWAGE and Anandi, the main objective

of the programme is to build women's human rights and right to a dignified living by building capacities of women collectives under MPSRLM.

A State level inception workshop was held in September 2020 to introduce the GJP to state level functionaries of the 17 new districts, after which a protocol for selection of Samta Samanvayaks was designed by mission staff at the district and block level in collaboration with Cluster Level Federation leaders from all the 18 districts. The protocol outlined that Samta Samanvayaks would be chosen from the senior Community Resource Person (CRP) cadre base, and will be trained as master trainers to support the implementation of the GJP.



The GJP is held together at the CLF level, in each block. 3 CLFs have been chosen to take forward the GJP expansion in each block, of which one is the nodal CLF. 3 Samta Samanvayaks in each Block (1 per CLF) will further identify and train Samta Sakhis (5 per CLF) who will give trainings at VO and SHG level through Participatory Action Learning Systems (PALS). Along with the Samta Sakhi, there is 1 Gender Point Person (GPP) appointed per SHG who is responsible for gender activity at the SHG level, to increase decision making and leadership skills among community women.

The selection of all new Samta Samanvayaks was completed in December 2020, post which a training on "Gender Equality and Women's Human Rights" was conducted for to build the gender perspectives of the new recruits. The training was interactive and gave space to women to share their stories and experiences. In continuation of the perspective building workshop, a two-day state level workshop with CLF leaders was also organised by MPSRLM, where Samta Samanyaks and CLF leaders became familiar with the concept of the 'Lok Adhikar Kendra', and their role in taking these centres forward. The trainings were a great success and laid the foundations for the expansion of the GJP.

Taking a step forward, in January 2021 MPSRLM organised a two days' Workshop

with District Managers and Nodal Programme Facilitation team from selected blocks, with the objective to streamline strategies and timelines of the 'Lok Adhikaar Programme'. The training used tools like 'Kiska Palada Bhari', and 'Dana Kothi Khali Kyun'

developed by Anandi, to build basic gender perspective and question existing gender norms, while simultaneously understanding the Gender Strategy of MPSRLM.

While selection of Samta Sakhis and identification of the GPP at the SHG level has been a crucial achievement; MPSRLM, Anandi and IWWAGE are interacting with CLF leaders and undertaking

evaluation of different approaches for feasibility, replicability, scalability, and

effectiveness to scale up the programme to the rest of the state.

*A participant shared during a session on socio-metric impacts, "I had never thought about my name, but now that I have started thinking about this when I return from here I will buy a scooty in my name!". In later interactions with the same participant the team has learned that she now has her own scooty.*



# Mainstreaming gender in India's policies

## ***Improve gender mainstreaming efforts in policy design and implementation***

Policies and programmes if designed using a gender lens can ensure gender equity and empower women and girls. One of the key areas of IWWAGE's work includes strengthening government engagement and informing policies and programmes to improve the lives of women and girls. By evaluating programme effectiveness to provide scalable solutions to policymakers and implementing agencies, we support key stakeholders to understand and use rigorous evidence and data to improve policy and programming on advancing gender equality and women's economic empowerment in India.

*IWWAGE undertakes analysis of various policies and programmes and provides actionable and feasible recommendations to improve gender mainstreaming efforts in public policy design and implementation.*

IWWAGE experts are part of various committees set up by Union ministries and provide technical expertise and advisory support to strengthen gender responsive planning, budgeting and programming.

Recently IWWAGE published a report that included ideas and recommendations for the Union Budget 2021-22 to address the

myriad needs of women and girls, particularly in the context of COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent economic lockdown. Additionally, in response to the open call for recommendations and amendments to various draft rules published by the Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE), IWWAGE submitted its suggestions to the ministry for two sets of draft rules: (i) Draft Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Rules, 2020; and (ii) Draft Code on Social Security (Central) Rules, 2020. [For details visit our Policy Engagement page.](#)

### **Opportunities for transformative financing for women and girls: Ideas for Union Budget 2021-22**

IWWAGE hosted a pre-budget consultation on 1 October 2020, to discuss and shape an actionable agenda on priority issues emerging in the COVID-19 context that are most vital to the empowerment of women and girls. The aim of the consultation was to identify and amplify the needs of millions of women and girls whose lives have been disrupted and severely affected because of the pandemic, but also account for the disadvantages and inequities that existed even before COVID-19. Read more on evidence and data-informed gender responsive policy recommendations and ideas for the [Union Budget 2021-22 here.](#)

IWWAGE, like some of the experts invited for the consultation, is part of the Broad-Based Committee on Gender Budgeting and Analysis that has been set up by the Ministry for Women and Child Development (MWCD). IWWAGE provided suggestions to support the gender responsive budgeting efforts of MWCD and that of other relevant ministries, and also shared these with the Ministry of Finance in response to their request for ideas for Union Budget 2021-22.



### **Suggested Amendments to Draft Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Rules, 2020 and Draft Code on Social Security (Central) Rules, 2020**

The Union Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE) on November 19, 2020 introduced the draft Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions (Central) Rule 2020. The draft rules enumerate provisions relating to safety, health and working conditions of different workmen including but not limited to dock workers, building or other construction workers, mines workers, inter-state migrant worker, contract labour, working journalists, audio-visual workers and sales promotion employees, etc. In response to the MoLE's request for comments on the draft rules, IWWAGE suggested a few amendments in a submission to the MoLE. These included suggestions on gender inclusive language in the rules; proportionate representation of women on safety committees constituted at the workplace; and studies to assess working conditions, safety and health of women inter-state migrants, among other suggestions.

### **Suggested Amendments to Draft Code on Social Security (Central) Rules, 2020**

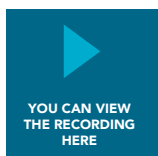
The draft Code on Social Security (Central) Rules was released on 13th November 2020 by the Union Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE). Apart from replacing nine Central rules, the draft rules also provide for the procedure to be followed in the self-registration process by gig workers, platform workers and unorganised workers. They also shed light on the manner in which aggregators carry out self-assessment of the contribution payable under Section-114(4) of the Code. IWWAGE made suggestions on the following aspects of the draft rules: (i) representation of women on various committees; (ii) ensuring that the rules are gender neutral; (ii) availability of crèches at workplaces that employ certain number of employees, proximity to the workplace, as well as guidance on quality of these crèches; (iii) social security benefits for gig and platform workers, among other suggestions. [Read more.](#)





# Rebuilding a dynamic and durable blueprint for India's social protection architecture

Sharon Buteau (ED, LEAD at Krea University), Vivek Bhandari (Visiting Professor of History, Krea University) and Soumya Kapoor Mehta participated in a conversation around rebuilding India's social protection architecture as part of AVPN South Asia's Impact Capital Festival, held on February 9, 2021. Through examples of successful applied research, the session addressed emerging design elements of social protection that are research, data, and systems driven. The speakers showcased institutional experiments at IWWAGE and LEAD that preserve human dignity while serving as vehicles for future growth, livelihoods and capability-building. The session also introduced the new *Envisioning India's Social Protection Architecture* initiative at Krea University which not only represents an urgent response to the immediate institutional challenges facing the world in the wake of COVID-19 related disruptions, but is also an attempt to reconfigure our understanding of the idea of social protection conceptually, based on first principles, while appreciating the fast-changing relationship between the state, private sector, civil society, and 21st-century notions of citizenship.



# Addressing unpaid childcare crisis for women and girls

The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent socio-economic crises has had significant ripple effects on women's employment and livelihoods; and saw a sharp increase in time spent by women on unpaid care work. Quality and affordable childcare centres can play a crucial role in improving and increasing women's participation in the labour force.

The learning session on Addressing the unpaid childcare crisis for women and girls: How can we build better after COVID-19? held on December 15, 2020 as part of the learning series started by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, aimed at fostering learning, exchanging ideas and establishing connections across partners working on evidence, advocacy, policies, and interventions related to COVID-19's social and economic impacts on women and girls.

As part of the larger mandate, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), and IWWAGE at LEAD are collaborating to undertake an evidence review of the current childcare crisis and the road for post-COVID recovery and resilience. A paper is also underway outlining the different pathways in which COVID-19 is impacting this crisis, and recommending policy solutions and measures that could be explored in different contexts by governments, the private sector, and other key development actors, with a focus on low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). A virtual consultation, Childcare crisis and COVID-19 evidence review held on January 22, 2021 aimed to generate expert feedback on the paper, specifically around the key findings and recommendations, to validate their appropriateness, feasibility, and fit for context.





## COVID-19 and implications for women's groups: Evidence emerging from India and sub-Saharan Africa

On 19 January 2021, the Evidence Consortium on Women's Groups (ECWG) organised a Learning Session on "COVID-19 and Implications for Women's Groups – Evidence Emerging from India and Sub-Saharan Africa", in order to discuss and receive feedback on findings and recommendations of the ECWG and IWWAGE co-authored brief "Self-Help Groups and COVID-19: Effects on and Challenges for the NRLM in India". Following a session with presenters and panellists from IWWAGE, American Institute for Research, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, CARE, Population Council India, and World Bank, participants from multilateral institutions, research organisations, development practitioners and others got an opportunity to listen, connect, share insights and reflections with each other in break-out groups, and discuss how this emerging evidence could be used to inform future programming, policy and research. Inputs and comments received during the learning session shall be incorporated to finalise the joint ECWG-IWWAGE brief.



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## India research insights – The COVID impact

India Research Insights – The Covid Impact is an India-Oxford Initiative (IndOx) inaugural extensive initiative in India in partnership with research centre LEAD at Krea University, under its collaboration with Krea University. The roundtable propelled by powerful research outcomes, brought together delegates from various research agencies tracking the Covid's impact on Mental Health, Migration, Gender, and Digital Media Consumption, to deliver insightful narratives.

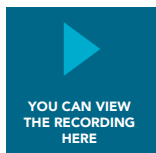
One of the sessions was presented by IWWAGE on – Impact of COVID on Women Labour in Informal Sector. The presentation focused on the challenges faced by women migrant workers in construction, factories and petty service segments as well as those faced by women's small and informal enterprises. The webinar highlighted women's resilience and role in community leadership to prevent the pandemic through the SHGs and focused on policy dimensions of what needs to be done to reduce challenges and enable women to return to the labour force.



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## Women and the future of work

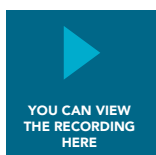
Soumya Kapoor Mehta participated in a panel called "Women and the Future of work", held as part of the 'Future of Work Forum' hosted by Arthan on 18 December 2020. The session aimed at unpacking the barriers that women face and continue to face in the context of Covid-19 and work; discuss what the future of work looks like for women and as a consequence, to the organisations hoping to retain and attract more women; and discuss future actions needed to improve women's role in the world of work, to build organisations that are more inclusive.



## REBUILD: COVID-19 and women in the informal economy in India, Kenya and Uganda

The COVID-19 pandemic has wrought a global socio-economic crisis, with profound implications for the well-being of individuals, households and communities. It has further deepened existing social inequalities and has heightened the risks for gender-based violence (GBV) and violation of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) among marginalised groups. As countries move to mitigate the health costs of the pandemic, the policy choices they make carry economic and social costs that are largely borne by vulnerable and low-income populations, among whom women are the most affected.

The International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) on December 17, 2020 launched a project focused on the impact of COVID-19 on women in the informal sector in Kenya, Uganda, and India. The upcoming collaborative research, REBUILD, focuses on the current challenges faced by women in the informal economy under COVID-19, as we aim to understand better the social and economic impact of policy responses to the pandemic.



## A call to ending gender based violence: What will it take?

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought in its wake, talks of a 'shadow' pandemic and a reported rise in cases of violence against women in India. While such violence existed for long, and although the story of violence is more nuanced (with differences in the types of violence women face depending on the nature of the lockdown), it is clear that more needs to be done to prevent it. As part of the 16 days of Activism against Gender Based Violence (GBV), the World Bank Lighthouse India team and IWWAGE organised a panel discussion on solutions for addressing violence against women. The webinar on December 3, 2020 brought together eminent speakers who have worked tirelessly on the issue of GBV in India, to touch upon the redress systems and agency needed to address the issue; and also discuss the impact of the pandemic on GBV.

Photo credit: PCI

# Impact of COVID-19 on rural SHG women in Odisha

## *Strengthening social networks, solidarity and economic support for SHG members*

In collaboration with Strengthening Women's institutions for Agency and Empowerment (SWAYAM) partners Project Concern International (PCI) and the Odisha Livelihood Mission (OLM), IWWAGE conducted a study on the Impact of COVID-19 on Rural SHG Women in Odisha in the month of July 2020. The study broadly focused on: (i) the overall impact on women's wellbeing during and post the lockdown period; and (ii) SHG response to the COVID-19 crisis. The study sampled 423 women across 8 SWAYAM Gram Panchayat Level Federations (GPLFs) in the districts of Deogarh and Jagatsinghpur in Odisha.

While study findings have been mixed, results show a high awareness about COVID-19 and its prevention among women. Ninety-nine per cent respondents reported to have received some information on key behavioural messages such as hand washing, social distancing and use of sanitizers. Furthermore, an extremely heartening finding was the immense support provided by the SHG movement, with 81 per cent of respondents saying they reached out to SHG members in times of need.

The study also showed that income generating activity of 40 per cent of the households had completely stopped or

was not generating enough earnings for subsistence. Eighty-three per cent households, especially those with the Below Poverty Line (BPL) and the Annapurna, senior citizen card holders (86 per cent), indicated an inability to buy more food once their current ration ran out. Over half the women interviewed indicated that their household burden in domestic tasks had risen, and approximately 89 per cent women reported that they were experiencing increased levels of stress and anxiety. Study results showed that 54 women were actively involved in running community kitchens and disseminating Covid-19 related health information. This is not a very high number, however as the districts where the study was conducted were high out-migration districts and did not see a very high number of Covid positive cases, this number is consistent with the overall scenario observed across Odisha and India.

*Study results clearly show that SHGs are an effective collective platform that contribute to strengthening social networks, solidarity and economic support for members.*

[READ THE REPORT HERE](#)

# Gender learning camps - Jharkhand

## Strengthening the gender intervention architecture in the state livelihood missions

The Deendayal Antayodaya Yojana-National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM), holds great promise for advancing women's socio-economic empowerment by organising them into self-help groups (SHGs) and institutions of the rural poor. The livelihoods programme works exclusively with rural women, and a critical element for its success has been the mission's commitment towards prioritising women's perspectives and being responsive to their needs and aspirations. This approach has been embedded across all DAY-NRLM activities with the goal of strengthening women's agency, identity, well-being, and solidarity, through women's collectivisation. Gender mainstreaming plays a crucial role in developing these pathways that can lead to better outcomes for women. NRLM believes that gender sensitisation and social action should be mainstreamed in its framework, systems, institutions and processes.

To meet this end, IWWAGE has built partnerships with well-known civil society organisations (CSOs), under our National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) vertical-SWAYAM to support gender interventions in select districts/blocks of four states in India, namely, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh and Odisha. These pilots will play a significant role in strengthening the gender intervention architecture of both the national and state livelihood missions.

In Jharkhand, SWAYAM is partnering with GROW (Gender-Responsive Organisations for Women) which is a tripartite partnership between PRADAN, Jagori and TRIF.

The evidence from the pilot will be built with creation of learning loops,

building gender responsive pedagogies and tool kits and creating strategies for scale up. Some of the key components of the work include building of gender-responsive SHG federations by sensitising village organisations' (VO) and cluster level federations' (CLF) leadership, developing a dedicated pool of women to work on gender, mainstreaming gender across functions, promoting panchayati raj institutions' (PRI) convergence, facilitating access to entitlements and redress mechanisms, and providing institutional support to the Jharkhand State Livelihood Promotion Society (JSLPS), the state's rural livelihood mission.

The scoping study in the project intervention areas in two blocks of Jharkhand (Dumri and Thethaitangar) showed that though women leaders and cadres received varied trainings, these were not specifically related to gender.

GROW is keen to develop intensive gender trainings to deepen consciousness and understanding of gender issues; enhance confidence, curiosity and analytical abilities; and develop an understanding of the multiple identities of women. With this focus, three-day residential Gender Learning Camps (GLCs) were jointly organised with JSLPS in the pilot blocks of Dumri and Thethaitangar, for women leaders from SHGs, federations, and cadres.

*The modules focus on social identities, hierarchies and exclusion; gender roles; gender discrimination and the socialisation process; gender division of labour; women's access to institutions; their control over assets and decision-making within the household; and causes, consequences and impacts of violence.*

*GROW intends to create a model of a gender responsive SHG federation demonstrated and institutionalised within Jharkhand State Livelihood Promotion Society (JSLPS).*



Training was imparted using innovative tools such as socio-gramming, institutional mapping, tableau and exercises such as tarazu, kamla-kamli, Mere Haq, Mere Pehchaan Patr, cycle of violence, and power walk. The primary methodology of these intensive trainings are participatory exercises

for reflection and analysis; lecture sessions for conceptualisation; movies for reflection and discussion; and creative sessions for experience sharing. The positive response to these trainings has encouraged the State livelihood mission to plan an upscale of the gender learning camps in 70 CLFs.





## Partnership with IndiaSpend to advance gender discourse

IWWAGE and IndiaSpend have come together for a yearlong partnership to examine and analyse issues around women's empowerment and strengthen the narrative that will encourage and allow for equal participation of women in economic activity. IndiaSpend will be developing evidence based and data driven stories to spot trends that uncover the

lives of real people, simplify complex issues, and bring to fore the facts behind issues of national and public interest. The partnership was launched with a video interview with Soumya Kapoor Mehta, Head IWWAGE as part of the Women@Work 2.0 series, which will examine barriers to women's employment and solutions to getting more women in paid work.

[VIDEO INTERVIEW CAN BE VIEWED HERE](#)

## Third annual workshop: Women in economics

The Indian Statistical Institute (ISI) Delhi Centre – with the support of the Initiative for What Works to Advance Women and Girls in the Economy (IWWAGE) – is organising a workshop on 11-13 March 2021. This is the third in the series of annual workshops hosted by the ISI under this partnership. In view of the ongoing pandemic, the 2021 workshop is planned to be held on an online platform. The overall objective of the upcoming workshop is to contribute towards

capacity-building among young women economists based in India. The themes include but are not limited to women's unpaid work in the household, women in manufacturing, how Covid-19 is changing women's economic participation, and so on. Selected papers will be presented in thematic sessions of the workshop. Up to two best papers, adjudged by a workshop committee, will receive awards.

[CLICK HERE FOR DETAILS](#)

## WorkFREE project in partnership with University of Bath

IWWAGE has entered into a research partnership with the University of Bath for a project called 'WorkFREE'. WorkFREE will centre around a social experiment conducted over 18 months in Hyderabad, India, with a community normally engaged in work understood to be exploitative or coercive (waste picking). This experiment will partner with the community, the University of Bath, the Indian Network for Basic Income, and two social and academic partners

in Hyderabad. The research team (IWWAGE and University of Bath) will conduct ethnographic work, action research, surveys and purposive qualitative sub-samples over two and a half years. The research will examine whether and with what consequences, unconditional cash transfers (given away as a social experiment) enhance the bargaining power of people typically constrained by circumstance to accept work that otherwise they would refuse.



# Female labourforce participation in India

## *Research brief series*

There are major gaps in understanding women's work. The issues not only revolve around better and improved measurement and counting of women workers but also deepen the understanding of barriers faced by women in accessing paid work as well as the quality and conditions of work preferred by the women. Addressing few key questions on these, IWWAGE and The Institute of Social Studies Trust (ISST) have jointly come out with a series of eight research briefs on

several issues addressing women's informal work, unpaid work, public employment and linkages between women's labourforce participation and various aspects namely, financial inclusion, access to land and property, safety at workplace and women's social identities and its impact on labour markets. In this volume of the Gender in Focus, we present some of the research briefs, which provide a way forward to take up further research in these areas.

[CLICK HERE TO READ BRIEF](#)

# Indian economy explained: Why is India's female labour force participation falling?

## *Podcast*

In November last year, India's female labour force participation rate fell to its lowest at 6.9 per cent. While 67 per cent of all men of working age are employed, only 9 per cent of all women of working age are employed in the country. Women's participation in the labour force is influenced and affected by many socio-economic factors such as education, age of marriage, urbanisation and others. To make the situation worse the economy has been struggling in the

aftermath of lockdowns and pre-existing problems. One of the most serious consequences of the pandemic is the way it has impacted women; India already had one of the world's lowest female labour force participation rates, which has only worsened now. To understand more about the falling labour force participation of women in India, the podcast platform, Suno India reached out to Sona Mitra, Principal Economist at IWWAGE.

[LISTEN TO PODCAST HERE](#)



# Look who lost their jobs and didn't get it back

## Podcast

The COVID-19 pandemic is re-defining the way we live. The implication of this huge global challenge is not only limited to health impacts, but is slowly building up to a devastating social, economic, political and humanitarian challenge. The pandemic is deepening pre-existing inequalities, exposing the vulnerable, and in turn amplifying the impacts of the crisis. These impacts, however, are not gender neutral. The ability to respond to COVID with a gender lens, therefore, is important so that the inequalities and challenges that women face are not exacerbated. In an economy that is crumbling under the effects of the pandemic,

women have been impacted adversely, and disproportionately so. They have lost more jobs than men, and are likely to lose more as the few jobs available go to men; while also bearing the brunt of domestic abuse, staring at long periods of anxiety, underlined by their inability to provide their children with food.

Gender Question is a weekly Hindustan Times podcast addressing blindspots around gender and sexuality, by looking at critical issues differently, with the help of experts. Listen to Soumya Kapoor Mehta sharing some critical evidence on women's work, more so in light of the impact of the pandemic on women.

[LISTEN TO PODCAST HERE](#)

# Gender watch

## Video series

IWWAGE brings to you a video series called, "Gender Watch" which presents in a capsule format news stories, data highlights and the latest research and thinking on gender issues

in India, particularly related to initiatives and interventions to empower women economically. Visit our [Gender Watch](#) section for upcoming episodes.

[VIEW THE LATEST EPISODE HERE](#)





### ■ Recognising housework: Is paying the only way?

Evidence from community-based organisations from around the world suggests that the burden of managing these responsibilities forces women to either take up low-quality jobs in the informal economy because they are part-time and allow them flexibility, or forces them to engage younger adolescents in such work — in India, various estimates suggest that approximately 94 per cent women work in the informal, unorganised sector. Either way, unpaid work performed by women and girls fundamentally alters their life opportunities. Indian women face an immense burden of care work,

and they will not be able to move away from it unless India universalises maternity entitlements and childcare as a public good. While it is a welcome attempt to provide worth to housework, steps to reduce and redistribute such work are perhaps more important than asking for women's unpaid work to be monetised, even notionally. Soumya Kapoor Mehta and Sona Mitra look at the challenges to compensating women for their unpaid work and offer recommendations to ensure women's rights and a sense of social justice.

[READ THE ARTICLE HERE](#)

### India cannot bounce back if it leaves its women behind

According to data by the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE), at least four in 10 women in India lost their jobs during the early months of the pandemic. This translates to an estimated 17 million women who were rendered jobless in March and April 2020 itself, in both the formal and informal sectors. The recovery is likely to be slow, with the odds of women working viz. men only declining over time. Many women

who are self-employed and work mostly under the insecure shadow of the informal economy, reported shutting down their ventures during the lockdown. Women on the other hand have spoken across the board of a rise on unpaid care commitments, job and food insecurities, and heightened cases of domestic violence. The article also talks about some stories of resilience and leadership and offers recommendations to build back better.

[READ THE ARTICLE HERE](#)

## Pandemic and the gender divide

Women and girls across the world have been disproportionately affected in the year of the pandemic, not in terms of the impact of the virus, but more so socially and economically. While India was rapidly responding to the health crisis, millions of Indians were grappling with the unintended impacts of the lockdown measures on the economy and their livelihoods. Even before the onset of COVID-19, India's female workforce was largely invisible, underpaid, under-protected

and constituted the largest segment of the informal workforce, which is among the worst-hit this year. But several opportunities exist in 2021 to ensure that India's women are not left behind in its recovery plans. The article looks at the data on women's workforce and livelihoods highlighting some worrying and promising trends in 2020, and talks about initiatives and opportunities that can be instrumental in ensuring that India's economic recovery is gender-responsive.

[READ THE ARTICLE HERE](#)

## How official data miss details on half of India's citizens

Lack of sex-disaggregated data and other gender-related gaps in Indian government's official data sources is making it difficult to track issues such as girls' and women's employment, asset ownership, health, sanitation and education. This results in limited understanding of gender issues and

poorly designed policies and programmes. In the second story in our Women@Work2.0 series, we examine which women-specific data points are not collated or made public, and how this makes women invisible and hinders progress towards gender-equality goals.

[READ THE ARTICLE HERE](#)

## Women hold up economy yet continue to disappear from workforce

The first article in a new series, Women@Work 2.0, examines barriers to women's employment including the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had, and potential solutions. Eight months after the lockdown was imposed, 13 per cent fewer women than a year ago were employed or looking

for jobs, compared to 2 per cent fewer men, with urban women seeing the deepest losses. Women entrepreneurs are struggling to survive; women employed as domestic help in cities, at construction sites and in call centres, and in handicraft and retail units, have lost jobs, IndiaSpend reported.

[READ THE ARTICLE HERE](#)

## Gig jobs give women higher incomes but little security

The COVID-19 pandemic-induced lockdown and the resultant economic slowdown has led to millions of salaried employees losing their jobs. While employment recovered in the months of July, August and September after the initial shock in April due to the lockdown, the trends are reversing with a 600,000 drop in employed persons in October and 3.5 million in November. The gig sector was equally impacted by the pandemic. Half of the gig workers lost their jobs and the other

half had lost up to two-thirds of their income. From more than half of the gig workers earning more than Rs 25,000 per month in March, nearly 87% were earning less than Rs 15,000 in August. Women workers were disproportionately affected as several services such as care work, domestic work and beauty and spa services were completely shut. IndiaSpend shares insights from gig workers and the challenges faced by them post lockdown.

[READ THE ARTICLE HERE](#)

## How Covid-19 pandemic has affected women workers in Delhi

India's labour force participation rate was 50.2% according to [PLFS, 2018-19](#). The pandemic seems to have further pushed people out of work. The [new edition of our Women@Work series](#), seeks to investigate the barriers to women's paid work. In this story, IndiaSpend examines the situation for women

workers in the Indian capital – envisioned as a world-class city – where employment rates (and attitudes) have been [nearly static since 1981](#). While women's work participation has been long invisibilised, the pandemic hit Delhi's informal workers hard and many women lost jobs.

[READ THE ARTICLE HERE](#)

## Budget 2021 expectations: A budget full of hope

The year 2021 started with a renewed sense of hope that countries will be able to bounce back to pre-pandemic levels of growth by designing and delivering relief packages that can stave off the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic, and set an off-kilter path back on track. But even as we eagerly await the green shoots of socio-economic recovery, it is important to note that the pandemic has altered in significant ways women's lives and their livelihoods; their access to nutritious food, health services and education; and the

nature of their work and ways of working. The Union Budget 2021-22 presents an opportunity to ensure that India's economic growth and development is inclusive of the millions of hopes and myriad needs of women and girls. This article shares some insights and recommendations on investments and policies to help avoid the reversal of decades of progress made on several measures of gender equality so that India can bounce back quicker and stronger.

[READ THE ARTICLE HERE](#)

# Women in work: How India fared in 2020

A recent report by Initiative for What Works to Advance Women and Girls in the Economy (IWWAGE) has revealed that though the COVID 19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdown has impacted people from all walks of life, this impact has been harsher for women and girls in India. The report, "Women in Work: How India Fared in 2020" jointly commissioned by The Quantum Hub

and IWWAGE reveals that labour participation rate, both at the urban and rural level, seems to have been affected the most during May-August 2020. Read a coverage by Mint: [How covid-19 changed the relationship of women with the workplace](#); and she the people: [Women Hit More Severely from COVID Impact on Employment](#)

[READ THE REPORT HERE](#)

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M-6, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Hauz Khas, New Delhi – 110 016, India

