

Not Enough Paid Opportunities For Women In New Normal

The Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated the already declining number of women in the workforce, explains Swati Rathor

In its 75th year of independence, India has more women enrolling in schools, colleges and universities, even as the number of women joining the workforce is on the decline, shows data. And the Covid-19 pandemic has only accelerated this pace with women, more than men, losing their jobs over the past year. Among them, many might never find their way back to work again.

Prabhakar Singh, head (institutional business), Centre For Monitoring Indian Economy (CME), said: "The most disproportionate loss of jobs because of the Covid-19 first wave was among urban women, who account for nearly 3% of total employment but accounted for 39% of total job losses. Of the 6.3 million jobs lost, urban women accounted for 2.4 million jobs lost," he said.

Only silver lining: Women in white collar jobs in services sectors like technology, consulting and BFSI were not hit, said Anjali Raghunanth, chief people officer, Randstad India.

In fact, the share of women in hiring increased in H2 of 2020 in BFSI, manufacturing and e-commerce sectors, shared Deval Singh, business head - telecom, IT&T, media and government, TeamLease Services. For instance, BFSI witnessed a rise in women participation from 38% to 41% in 2020.

But harring these segments, a high number of women seem to be dropping out of the workforce due to mental and physical health reasons, she said. The burden of domestic re-

sponsibilities thrust upon them by Covid-19, is also a reason.

When it comes to semi-skilled and unskilled jobs, Sona Mitra, principal economist at the Initiative for What Works to Advance Women and Girls in the Economy (IWWAGE), said that men are taking over some of the jobs, earlier held by women.

SUNDAY SPECIAL

Example: the construction sector and MNREGA. "Generally, women used to take up work under MNREGA. But after many migrant workers returned to their villages, the number of men participating in MNREGA work has significantly gone up," she added.

In agriculture too women are being edged out by farm mechanisation with the exception of states like Punjab and Haryana where women are being trained for modern farming.

The Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2019-20 shows that the construction sector witnessed a decline of 26% in jobs compared to April and June 2020 as compared to April and June 2019 with women losing more jobs than men

THE GREAT INDIAN KITCHEN

• A TeamLease study found that Indian women spend 6X more time than men on daily household chores and responsibilities



26% of women spend anywhere between 4 and 6 hours doing domestic chores which affect their work productivity

• Covid amplified these pressures and served as a major contributor to the fall in female FLPR (labour force participation rate)

• Maternity benefits, childcare support and flexibility of working hours will help rope in more women in manufacturing

— C K Ranganathan | CHAIRMAN, CSI SOUTHERN REGION

NUMBERS TELL A SORDID TALE

• As per World Bank Data, India has slipped from FLPR (Female labour force participation rate) of

30.27% in 1990 to

20.8% in 2019,

falling behind countries like

Bangladesh | Indonesia | Nepal

36.37% | 54% | 82%

• During the lockdown and in the months after, 61% of working men remained employed and 7% lost employment and did not return to work.

• Irrespective of their employment arrangement, a startlingly high share of women, nearly half, withdrew from work over this one year, compared to only 11% of men.

• Worryingly, in proportionate terms, the exit was highest in the case of salaried women workers at 56%

• 44% of self-employed women had left the workforce, compared to 10% of men

*Source: World Bank, State of Working India 2021 Report

NEED FOR INCENTIVES

As the economy slowly recovers, experts feel that sectors employing women need to provide for skilling, quality childcare facilities at work and, most importantly, facilitate a social change that gives respite to women from the burden of back-breaking domestic work. Only then, they say, women can get back to paid work.

Incentivising sectors such as textiles by the government - it employs more women - is one way, suggested Sona Mitra, principal economist at IWWAGE. This could be through subsidies or tax breaks for expanding employment.

Citing the example of companies like Foxconn, industry experts pointed

out that sectors like electronics, food processing and pharma too can increase the share of women in the workforce.

Mitra added that childcare facilities across sectors, irrespective of the size of the organisation, are important for women to continue to work. Currently only a few large MNCs have this infrastructure.

Chandrasekhar Sripathi, practice professor (OB & strategic human capital) and executive director (human capital & leadership initiative) at the Indian School of Business, said, "One of our studies found that wherever women trained

women, more women went into self-employment as they were able to instill confidence and wherever men



trained women, the relative participation of women in labour force was lower."

At the policy level, Deval Singh said the recent labour code reforms has brought some hope in the labour market through its social security codes but when it comes to the female workforce, 90% of them are self-employed or in informal jobs, which is why they may not benefit most working women.