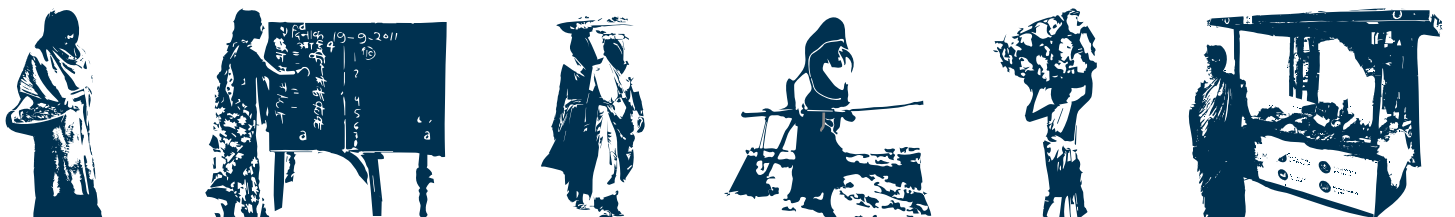


## WOMEN'S WORKFORCE PARTICIPATION IN INDIA: **STATEWISE TRENDS**

# KERALA



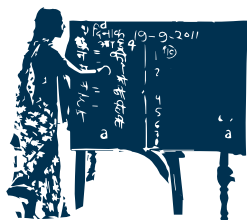
This series of state factsheets highlight important aspects of the status of women's employment in the states. The factsheets use secondary data provided by the National Sample Surveys' Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), 2017-18, 2018-19, 2019-20 and 2020-21. The factsheets also draw on data from the employment – unemployment surveys (EUS) conducted by the same agency in previous years as well as data from other sources to support state specific analysis.

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## Kerala

Kerala is a relatively high-income Indian state with a per capita Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP)<sup>1</sup> of around INR 1,46,910 against the national average of around INR 99,694. The GSDP of the state<sup>2</sup> is INR 5,14,399 crores. According to Census of India 2011, of its 3.3 crore population,<sup>3</sup> 48 per cent is male and 52 per cent female. The high literacy rate of around 90 per cent has negligible difference between men (96.02 per cent) and women (91.98 per cent). The state also has an outstanding sex ratio of 1,084 as compared to the national average of 943. The average daily wage gap difference between men and women is INR 205.21 with the male and female average daily wages<sup>4</sup> at INR 741.89 and INR 536.68, respectively, in 2020-21. In 2019, the sub national Human Development Index (HDI)<sup>5</sup> for men and women was 0.727 and 0.820, respectively, higher than the national figures of 0.573 and 0.698, respectively. On the other hand, the state's Female Labour Force Participation Rate (FLFPR) is surprisingly low in rural and urban areas at 29.5 per cent and 25.2 per cent, respectively.



<sup>1</sup> According to quick estimates in 2020-21 from Kerala State Planning Board, Economic Review (2021) pp. XV  
[https://spb.kerala.gov.in/sites/default/files/2022-03/ECNO\\_%20ENG\\_21\\_%20Vol\\_1.pdf](https://spb.kerala.gov.in/sites/default/files/2022-03/ECNO_%20ENG_21_%20Vol_1.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Kerala State Economics and Statistics Department (2020-21) <https://www.ecostat.kerala.gov.in/>

<sup>3</sup> Census 2011 <https://www.census2011.co.in/census/state/kerala.html>

<sup>4</sup> Kerala State Planning Board, Economic Review (2021) pp. 12  
[https://spb.kerala.gov.in/sites/default/files/2022-03/ECNO\\_%20ENG\\_21\\_%20Vol\\_1.pdf](https://spb.kerala.gov.in/sites/default/files/2022-03/ECNO_%20ENG_21_%20Vol_1.pdf)

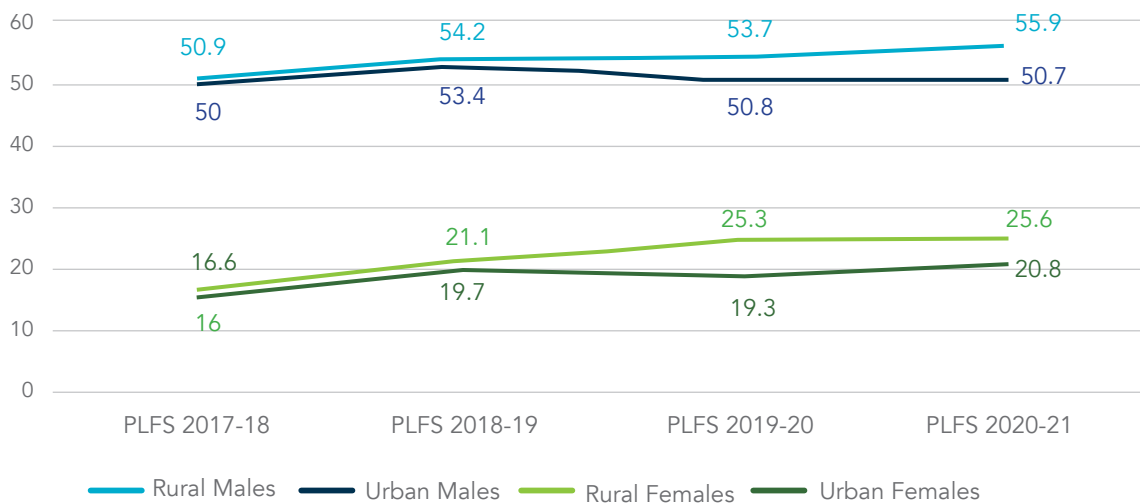
<sup>5</sup> Global Data Lab, Sub National HDI  
<https://globaldatalab.org/shdi/table/2019/shdi+shdif+shdim/IND/?levels=1+4&extrapolation=0>



## Trends in Female Workforce Participation Rates (FWPR)

- In 2020-21, Workforce Participation Rate (WPR) in rural Kerala was 25.6 per cent which is lower than the national average by a mere 1.5 percentage points. On the other hand, the situation is different in urban areas, where WPR was higher by 3.8 percentage points than national figures.
- The FWPR has increased at a faster pace in rural as compared to urban areas. The WPR increased from 16.6 per cent in 2017-18 to 25.6 per cent in 2020-21 for rural women and, for urban women, it has increased from 16 to 20.8 per cent in the same reference period.
- Interestingly, the male female gap in workforce participation has reduced marginally over the reference period by 4.4 percentage points across the regions.

Figure 1: Workforce Participation Rate



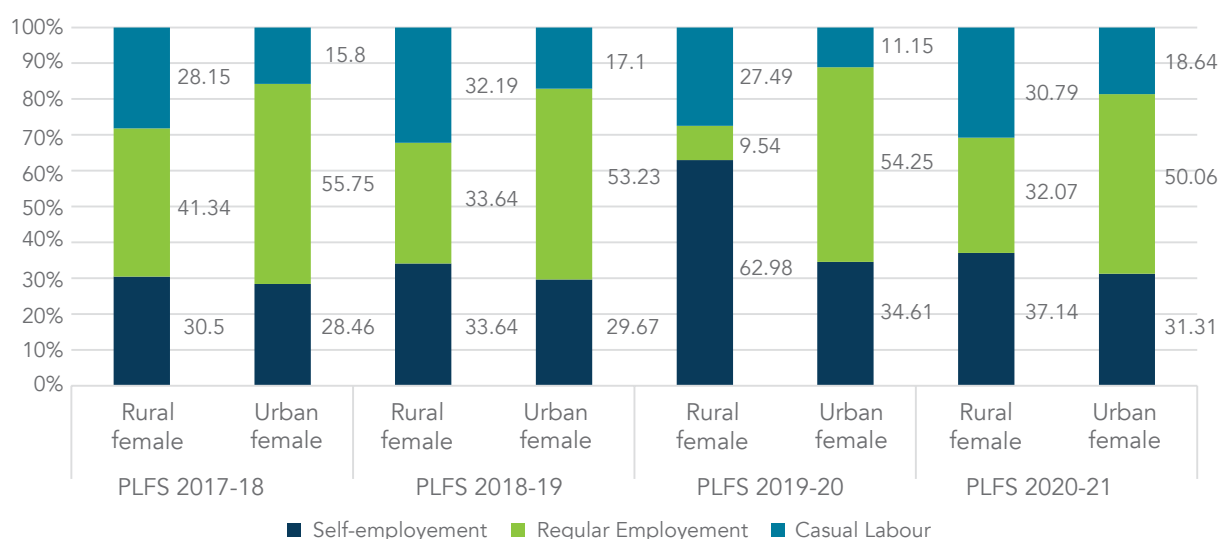
Source: Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2017-18, PLFS 2018-19, PLFS 2019-20, and PLFS 2020-21, National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO), Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), Government of India (GoI). The WPR figures are calculated for males and females of all age groups.



## Distribution of Women Workers by Status of Employment

- The usual status of employment among women workers in Kerala is consistent with the national trends, with most rural women engaged in self-employment and urban women in regular employment.
- The number of self-employed women increased from 30.5 to 37.1 per cent in rural areas and from 28.4 to 31.3 per cent in urban areas between 2017-18 and 2020-21 (Figure 2). Alongside, unpaid family work<sup>6</sup> within self-employment has jumped from 24.9 to 26.8 per cent and, in urban areas, it has decreased from 24.1 to 21.1 per cent between 2018-19 and 2020-21. The proportion of women employed as unpaid workers and employers was higher in rural areas than in urban areas in 2020-21. On the other hand, the situation with own account workers is quite different with its numbers higher in urban areas than rural areas (Figure 3).
- In case of regular employees, it declined from 41.3 to 32 per cent in rural areas, and by 5.7 percentage points from 55.7 to 50 per cent in the urban areas.
- The number of women employed in casual work is greater in rural areas as compared to urban areas, which is consistent with the national figures. The data reveal that the number of women engaged in casual work has increased in both rural and urban areas from 28.1 to 30.7 per cent and 15.8 to 18.6 per cent, respectively, between 2017-18 and 2020-21.

Figure 2: Distribution of Women Workers by Status of Employment



Source: Author's Estimates using Unit Level Data from PLFS 2017-18, PLFS 2018-19, PLFS 2019-20 and PLFS 2020-21.

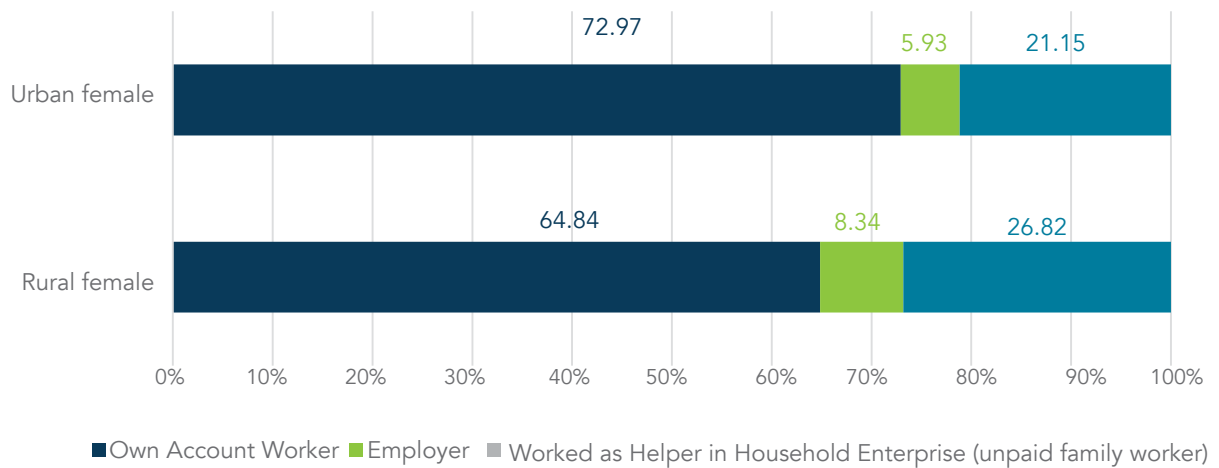
<sup>6</sup> Author's estimate using unit level data from PLFS 2018-19 and 2020-21.

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- On further investigation, it can be inferred that, in urban Kerala, 72.9 per cent women are own account workers, 21.1 per cent are unpaid family workers and a meagre 5.9 per cent work as employers. In rural Kerala, trends are similar. Around 64.8 per cent women are involved as own account workers, 26.8 per cent as unpaid family workers and 8.3 per cent as employers.

Figure 3: Distribution of Self Employed Women Workers



Source: Author's Estimates using Unit Level Data from PLFS 2020-21.



## Distribution of Self-employed Women Workers by Broad Industry Types

- PLFS 2020-21 reveals that 37.1 per cent rural and 31.3 per cent urban women are self-employed (Figure 2).
- -In the rural region, 63 per cent women are involved in agriculture and fishing, followed by 15 per cent in the manufacturing sector and 10 per cent in wholesale and trade-related activities.
- -In the urban region, trends are similar with 37 per cent of women in agriculture and fishing, followed by 33 per cent in the manufacturing sector and 13 per cent in wholesale and trade related activities.
- -The sectors that have less than 10 per cent women’s involvement across both regions are education, finance and real estate, accommodation and food services, amongst others.

Figure 4a: Self Employed Rural Women across Industry Groups

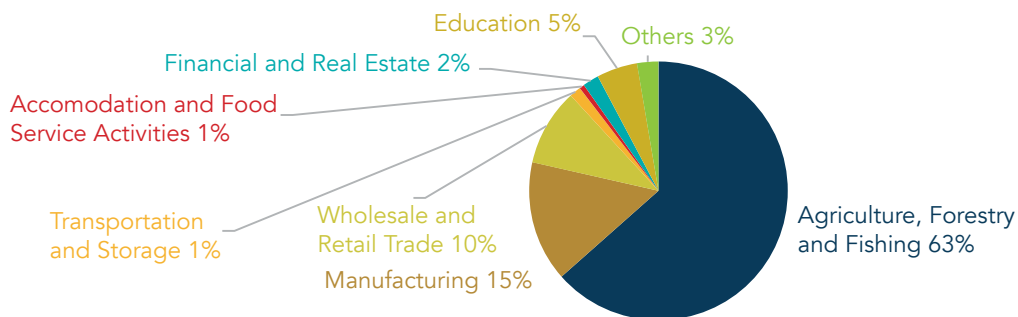
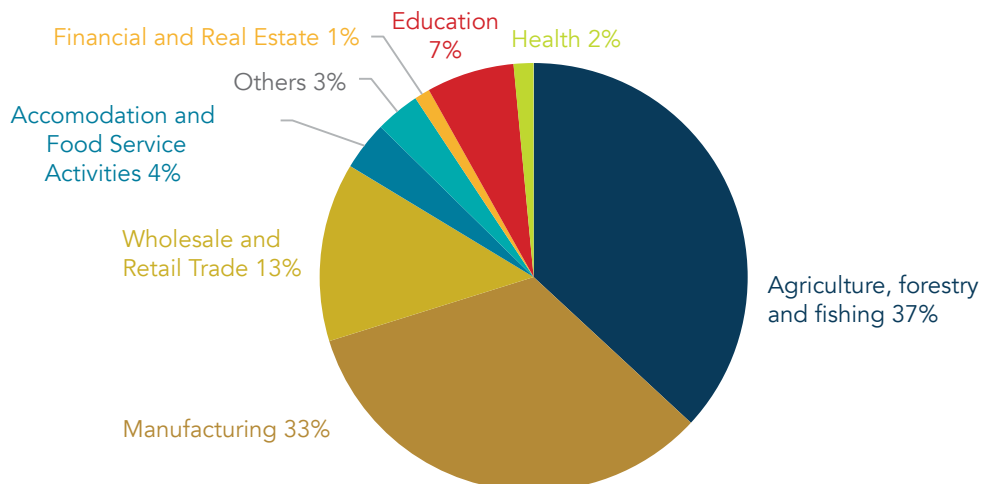


Figure 4b: Self Employed Urban Women across Industry Groups



Source: Author’s estimates using unit level data from PLFS 2020-21.



## Distribution of Women Workers by Broad Industry Divisions

- In rural Kerala, 39 per cent women are involved in agriculture, forestry and fishing, a much smaller percentage as compared to the national average of 75 per cent, followed by 12 per cent in manufacturing and the remaining number spread across different industries. The low percentage of women in agriculture can be linked to the shift from food crops to cash crops, production of which is usually dominated by men. Rather than on agriculture, state relies on the service sector, which has much better working conditions, for most of its revenue<sup>7</sup>.
- In urban Kerala, the situation is different with an equal proportion of 17 per cent women engaged in agriculture and manufacturing, followed by 14 per cent in education and the remaining number in wholesale and retail trade and other services.
- The proportion of women dependent as rentiers, pensioners, remittance recipients in rural and urban areas are 14.4 per cent and 13.3 per cent, respectively<sup>8</sup>.

Figure 5a: Industry wise distribution of Rural Women Workers

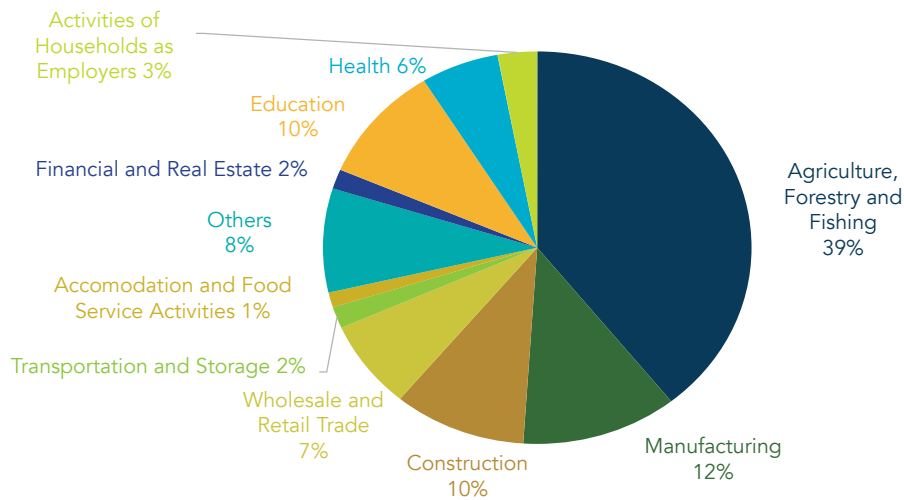
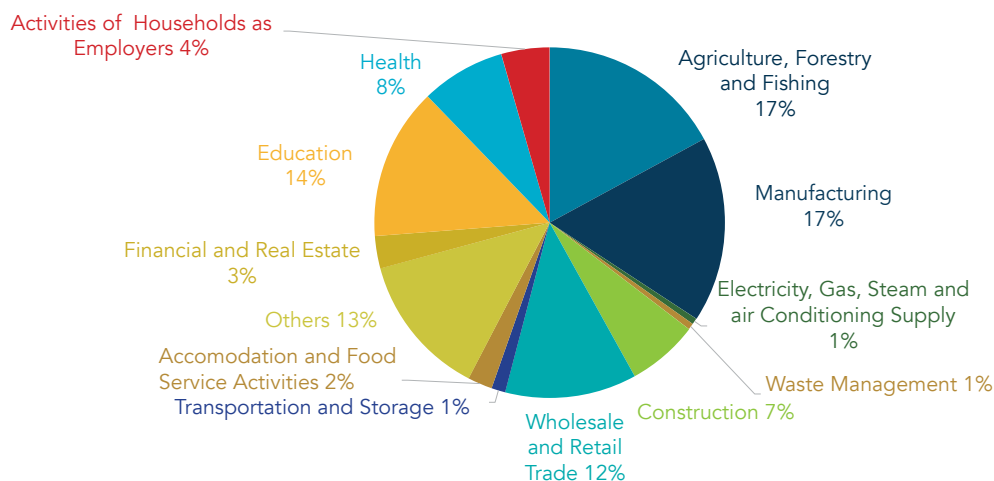


Figure 5b: Industry Wise distribution of Urban Women Workers



Source: Author's Estimates using Unit Level Data From PLFS 2020-21.

<sup>7</sup> Kumar, Dr B. Pradeep (2017). [https://mpr.aub.uni-muenchen.de/82427/1/MPRA\\_paper\\_82427.pdf](https://mpr.aub.uni-muenchen.de/82427/1/MPRA_paper_82427.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Author's estimate using unit level data from PLFS 2020-21.



## Distribution of Women Workers by Occupation Types

- In rural Kerala, elementary and agricultural work is the mainstay of 34 per cent and 22 per cent of women, respectively. Around 12 per cent work as legislators and managers, a number far higher than the national figure of 3.2 per cent.
- In urban Kerala, the trend is the same with 24 per cent women involved in elementary occupations and 13 per cent women working as technicians and associate professionals. Around 15 per cent women work as legislators and managers which is slightly higher than the national average of 12.2 per cent.
- Across both regions, the proportion of women working in crafts and trade-related work, clerical jobs, and as plant and machine operators comprises less than 10 per cent.

Figure 6a: Occupation types of Rural Women

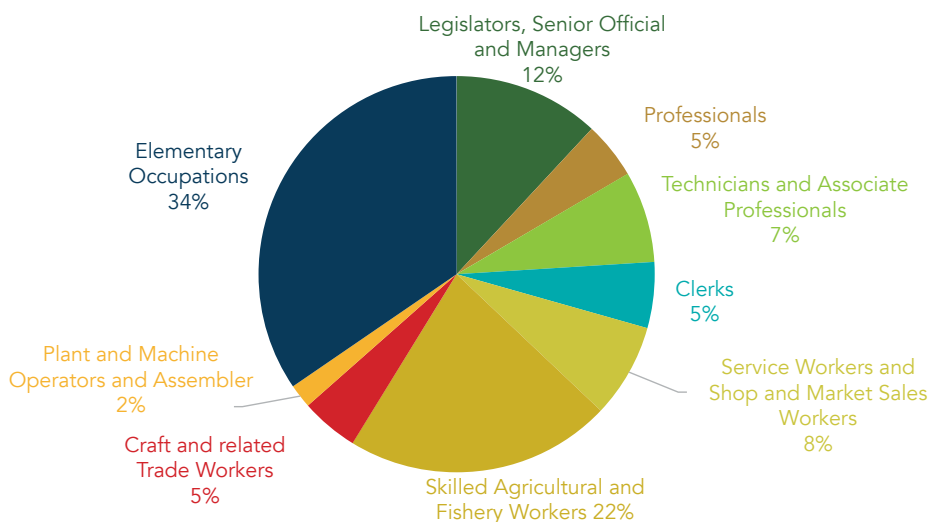
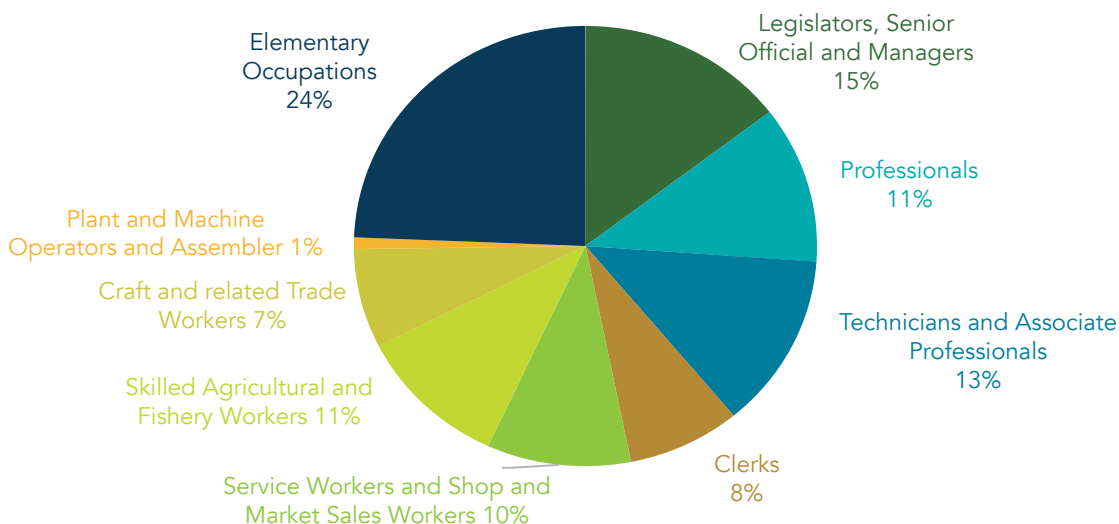


Figure 6b: Occupation types of Urban Women



Source: Author's estimates using unit level data from PLFS 2020-21.





## Distribution of Women Regular Workers by Broad Industry Types

- PLFS 2020-21 reveals that 32 per cent women are involved in regular rural employment, whereas around 50 per cent are involved in urban regular employment (Figure 2)
- In the rural region, 24 per cent women are involved in the education sector, followed by 18 per cent in the health services, and 17 per cent in other services<sup>9</sup>.
- In the urban region, trends are similar. Around 23 per cent women are involved in the education sector, 22 per cent in information and communication and 14 per cent in the health sector.
- The sectors that saw less than 10 per cent women’s involvement across both regions are construction, finance and real estate, accommodation, and food services, amongst others.

Figure 7a: Industry wise distribution of regular wage rural women

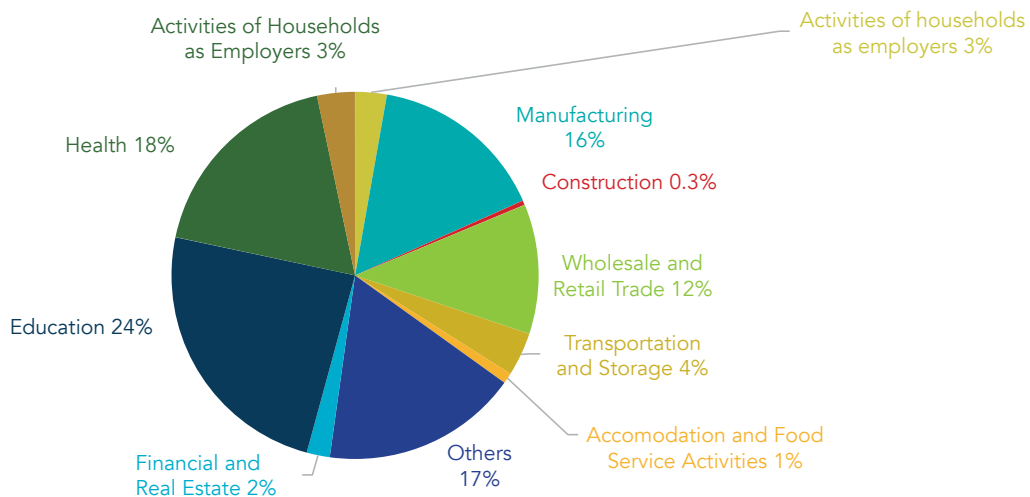
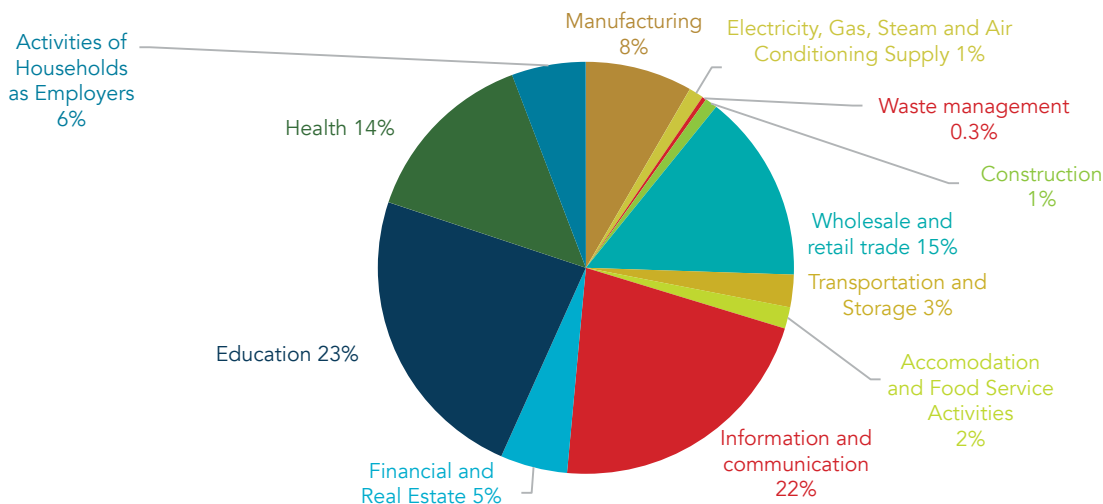


Figure 7b: Industry Wise distribution of regular Wage Urban Women



Source: Author’s estimates using Unit Level Data from PLFS 2020-21.

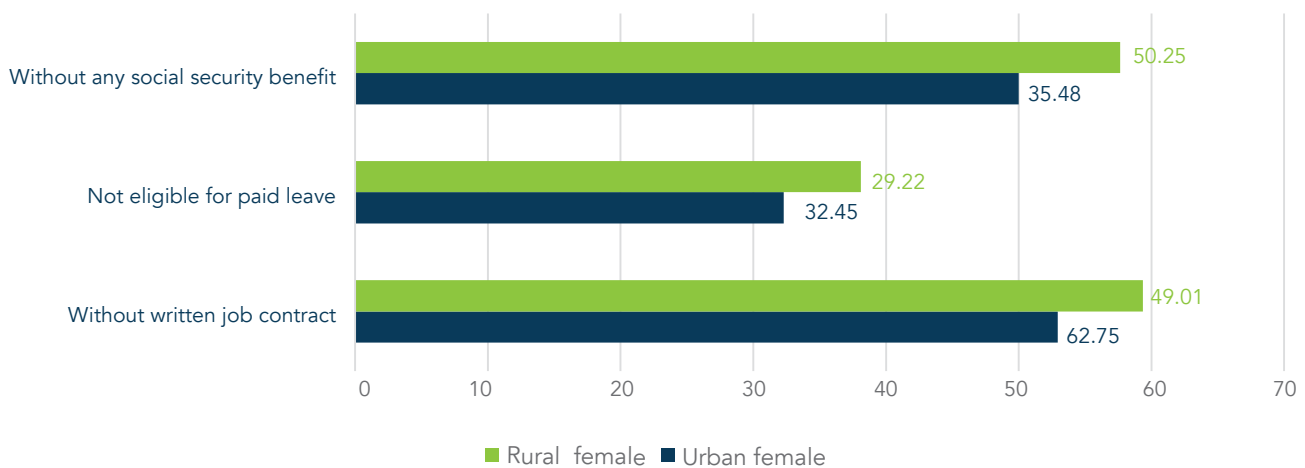
<sup>9</sup> ‘Others’ category includes the following sectors: information and communication, professional, scientific and technical activities, administrative and support service activities, public administration and defence; compulsory social security, arts, entertainment and recreation and other service activities



## Condition of Work in Regular Employment

- Regular wage women employees constitute the largest proportion in the urban region. However, a deep dive into their working conditions depicts their vulnerable state.
- PLFS 2020-21 reveals that half of the urban women do not have any social security benefit and written job contract and around 32.2 per cent are not eligible for paid leave. Similarly, 59.3 per cent of rural women do not have a written job contract, 57.6 per cent women do not have social security benefits and 38.1 per cent women not eligible for paid leave. These figures are lower than the national average.

Figure 8: Working conditions in Regular Employment



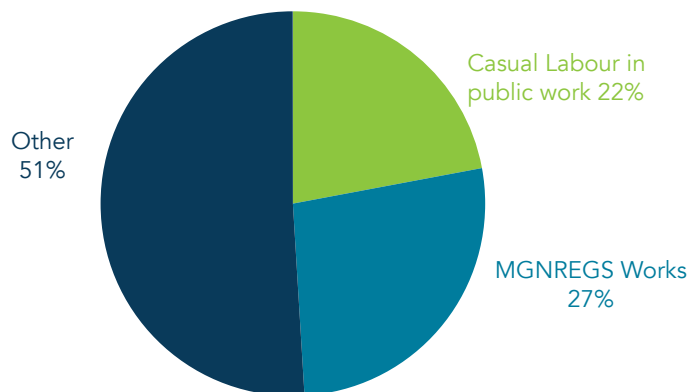
Source: Author's Estimates using Unit Level Data from PLFS 2020-21.



## Women Workers in Rural Casual Employment

- PLFS 2020-21 reveals that 30.7 per cent women are employed in casual work in rural areas (Figure 2).
- Further diversification of casual work reveals that 50.9 per cent women are engaged in non-public work, followed by 27 per cent women dependent on Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) income and 22 per cent women involved in public work.

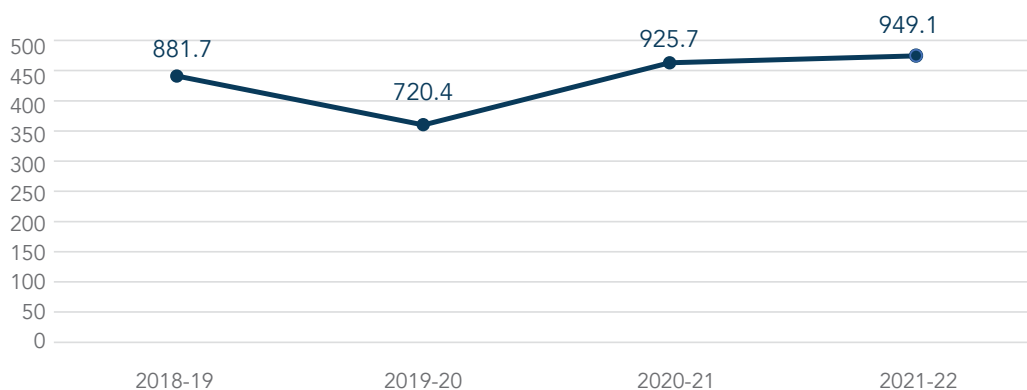
Figure 9: Rural Women Workers in Casual Employment



Source: Author's estimates using unit level data from PLFS 2020-21.

- The number of women person-days under MGNREGS have been significantly higher than in other Indian states. In 2021-22, women person-days increased to 949.1 lakhs<sup>10</sup>.
- -Currently, 41.12 lakh women from rural Kerala are registered under MGNREGS, of which 50 per cent are active members<sup>11</sup>. Since 2010, women have made up 90 per cent of the workforce in the state, compared to 55 per cent nationally. Women's participation in MGNREGS in Kerala is higher because of Kudumbashree's active role in mobilisation, work identification, planning, and implementation<sup>12</sup>.

Figure 10: Women Persondays under MGNREGA (in Lakhs)



Source: Author's Estimates using MGNREGA Dashboard.

<sup>10</sup> Author's estimates using MGNREGA dashboard

[https://mnregaweb4.nic.in/netnrega/all\\_lv\\_details\\_dashboard\\_new.aspx?Fin\\_Year=2022-2023&Digest=ftWywJ4W7YWkLDX82gF7Mw](https://mnregaweb4.nic.in/netnrega/all_lv_details_dashboard_new.aspx?Fin_Year=2022-2023&Digest=ftWywJ4W7YWkLDX82gF7Mw)

<sup>11</sup> Author's estimates using MGNREGA dashboard for 2022-23.

<sup>12</sup> Smitha, E. K. and Karunakaran, N. (2021). Gender sensitive policies and participation of women: a case of MGNREGS in Kerala: <https://www.jmra.in/html-article/13790>

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## CONCLUSION

In Kerala, the interesting trend in FLFPR is the result of unusual economic trends. A large part of the economy is dependent on remittances and the service sector is much more developed than in the rest of the country. The number of women engaged in agriculture is much lower compared to other states; instead, they are participating in the workforce at slightly higher rates in non-farm activities in the rural areas. The gender wage gap has also narrowed over time. However, the number of regular women workers has decreased while that of women working as casual workers has increased. This is a cause of concern and needs further probing to discover long lasting solutions.

The factsheet is prepared by Suchika Gupta and, reviewed by Sona Mitra and Bidisha Mondal, IWWAGE – Lead at KREA University. Copyright @2022

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