

# TREND IN FEMALE LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION IN ASSAM



This factsheet highlights important aspects of the status of women's employment in Assam. The factsheets use secondary data provided by the National Sample Surveys' Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), 2017-18 to 2023-24







ASSAM





## Introduction

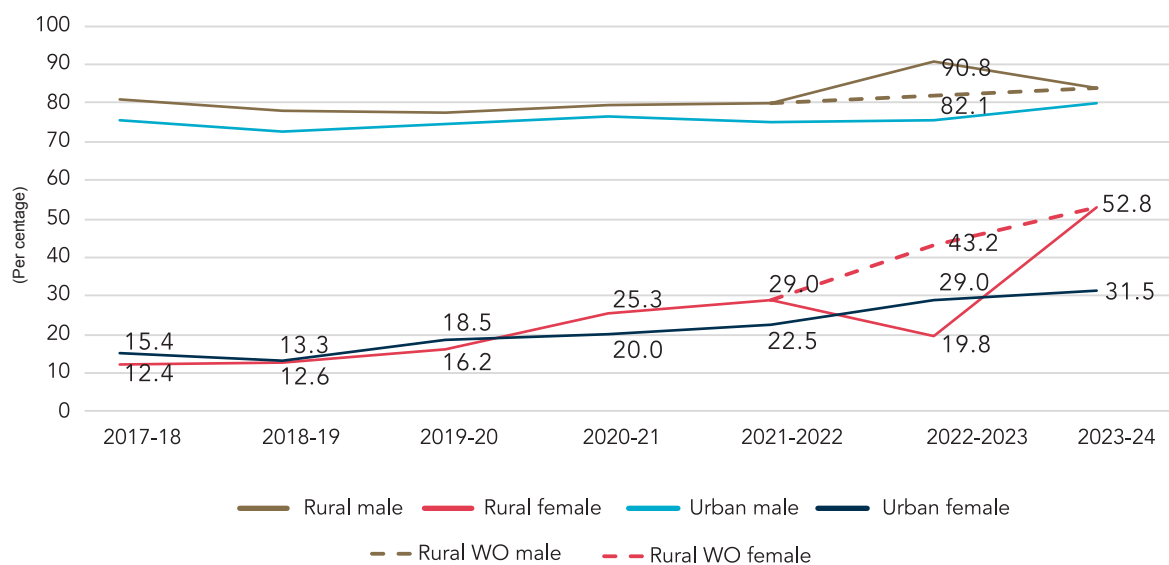
Assam has shown a notable surge in female labour force participation (FLFP) since 2021-22, currently exceeding the national average (50 per cent vs. 42 per cent in PLFS 2023-24). However, the 2022-23 saw the widest gender gap in LFPR and the state's lowest recorded FLFP nationally- an anomaly attributed due to a recognized NSSO weighing error in a few villages, which skewed population and workforce estimates. This also led to underreporting female participation in the labour market in all three levels of district, state and the country as a whole<sup>1</sup>.

In recent years, Assam has implemented various pro-women initiatives like self-employment and skill development schemes<sup>2</sup>. These programmes, such as *Sarothi* (provide financial assistance in the form of loan with interest subvention through a designated bank covering the whole state) and *Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana 2.0* (to enable the youths to take up various industry relevant skill training which will help them secure a sustainable livelihood.), are considered to have led to increase in the FLFPR<sup>3,4</sup>. Therefore, upcoming analysis will present corrected PLFS data<sup>5</sup> to accurately reflect trends and examine the characteristics of the rising female employment in Assam.

## Trends in Female Labour Force Participation Rates

- The rural Female Labour Force Participation Rate (FLFPR) in Assam experienced a significant acceleration after the COVID-19 pandemic year (2021-22), increasing from 29 per cent to 43 per cent in 2022-23 (indicated by a dotted line). However, as acknowledged by the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), a weighing error in three rural villages inflated the population estimate of those villages, consequently reducing the district's sex ratio to 669 in 1000 males and FLFPR at 19.8 per cent in 2022-23<sup>6</sup>. When correcting for this error by excluding the overweighed district of South Salma Mankachar, the dotted line reflects a corrected estimate that aligns with the national average trend in FLFPR.
- The urban FLFPR has also witnessed a rising trend, like other states of the country, rising from 15.4 to 31.5 per cent between 2017-18 to 2023-24.

Figure 1: Trend in LFPR from 2017-18 to 2023-24



\*For ages 15 years and above

\*WO-without error (estimates after correcting for error)



## Distribution of Women Workers by Status of Employment

- In rural areas, the proportion of self-employed women workers was low at 18.5 per cent in 2017-18 but then significantly increased to 77.3 per cent in 2023-24. This surge is significantly higher than the national trend, where these values improve but modestly over the same period. Consequently, the proportions of casual and regularly salaried workers declined drastically between 2017-18 and 2023-24.
- In urban areas, the percentage of women engaged in self-employment increased from 32.3 per cent in 2017-18 to 48.9 per cent in 2023-24. Simultaneously, the proportion of women in regular salaried work declined from 62.8 per cent to 47.9 per cent between 2017-18 and 2023-24.

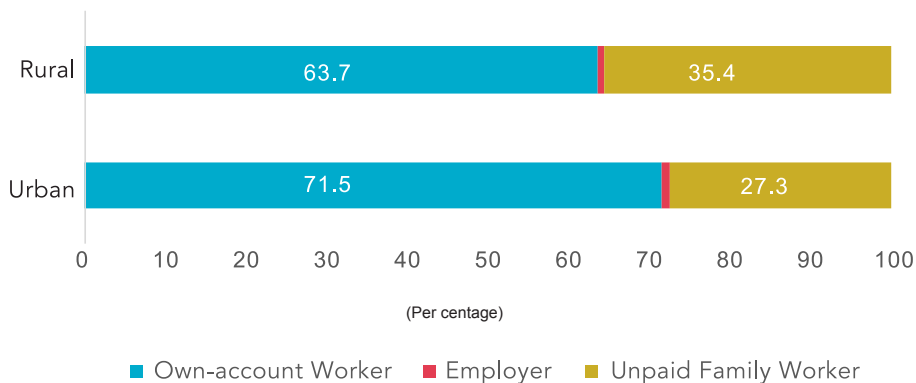
Figure 2: Trend in Women Workforce across Type of Employment



\*For ages 15 years and above

- In rural Assam, the majority of self-employed women are own-account workers, constituting over 63.7 per cent of this group. Both rural and urban regions exhibit a similar trend in the composition of their self-employed female workforce. This trend is consistent with the national pattern, where both rural and urban regions have seen a growing or sustained share of own-account workers, while only a slight reduction in unpaid family work.

Figure 3: Distribution of Self-Employed Women



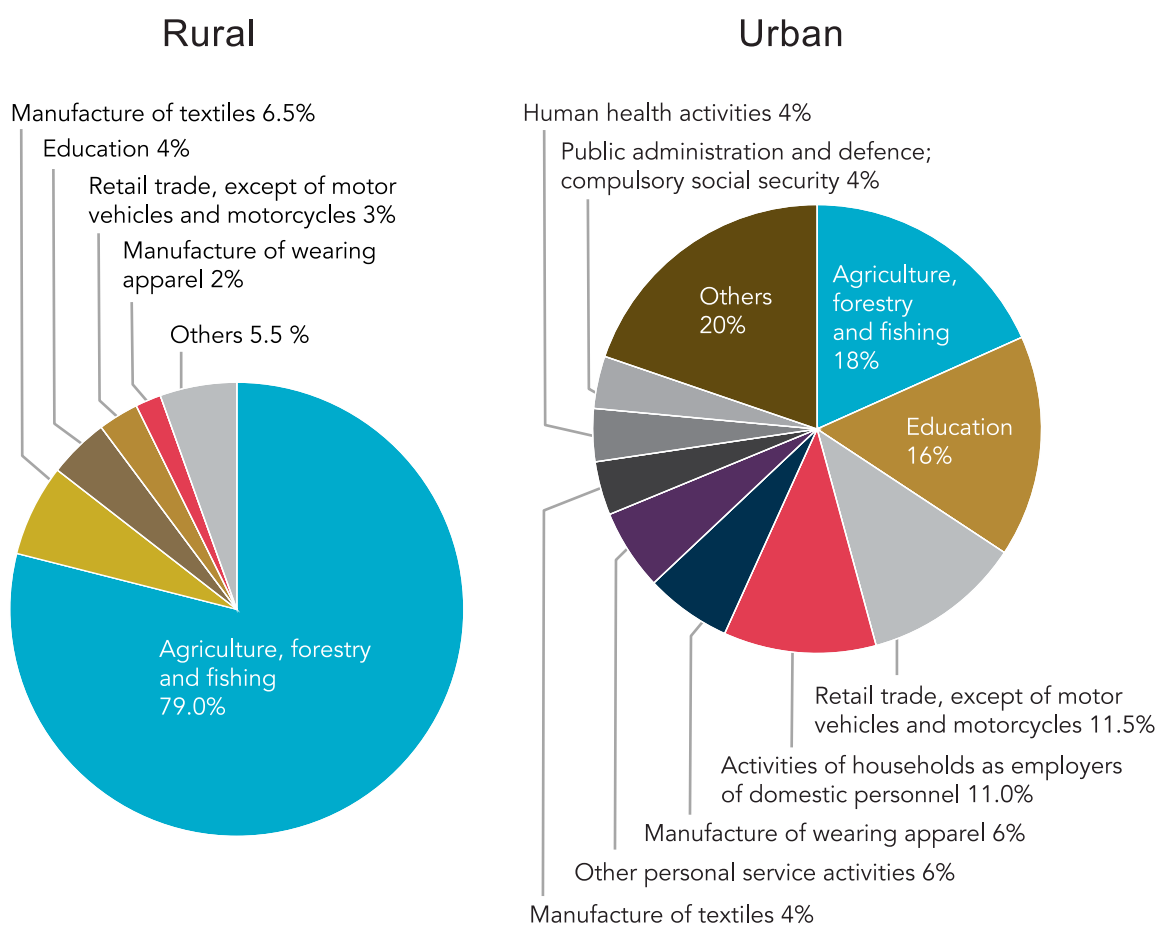
\*For ages 15 years and above



## Distribution of Women Workers by Broad Industry Divisions

- Mirroring the national trend, the sectoral distribution of women in rural region indicates that nearly 79 per cent are employed in agriculture and allied activities, followed by manufacturing of textiles at 6.5 per cent and retail trade at 5.6 per cent.
- In urban areas, the primary sectors of employment for women are agriculture and allied (18.3 per cent), education (16 per cent), and retail trade (11 per cent). This aligns with the national trend as agriculture and education compose the highest share of women followed by other industries.

Figure 4: Distribution of Women Workforce by Broad Industry Divisions



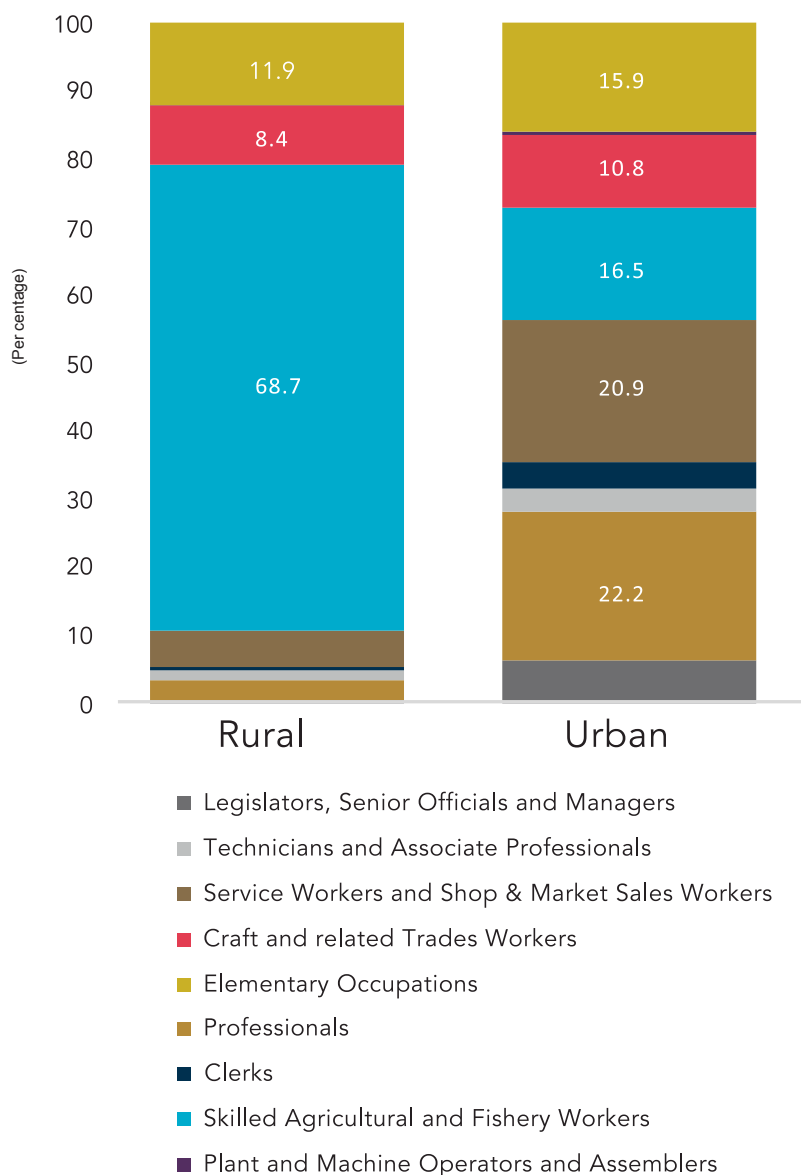
\*For ages 15 years and above



## Distribution of Women Workers by Occupation Types

- In the rural region of the state, over 68.7 per cent of women are working as skilled agricultural and fishery workers, followed by 11 per cent in elementary occupations.
- In urban areas, profession constitute the largest share at 22.2 per cent, followed by service and shop and market sales workers at 21 per cent.

Figure 5: Occupational Classification of Women Workers

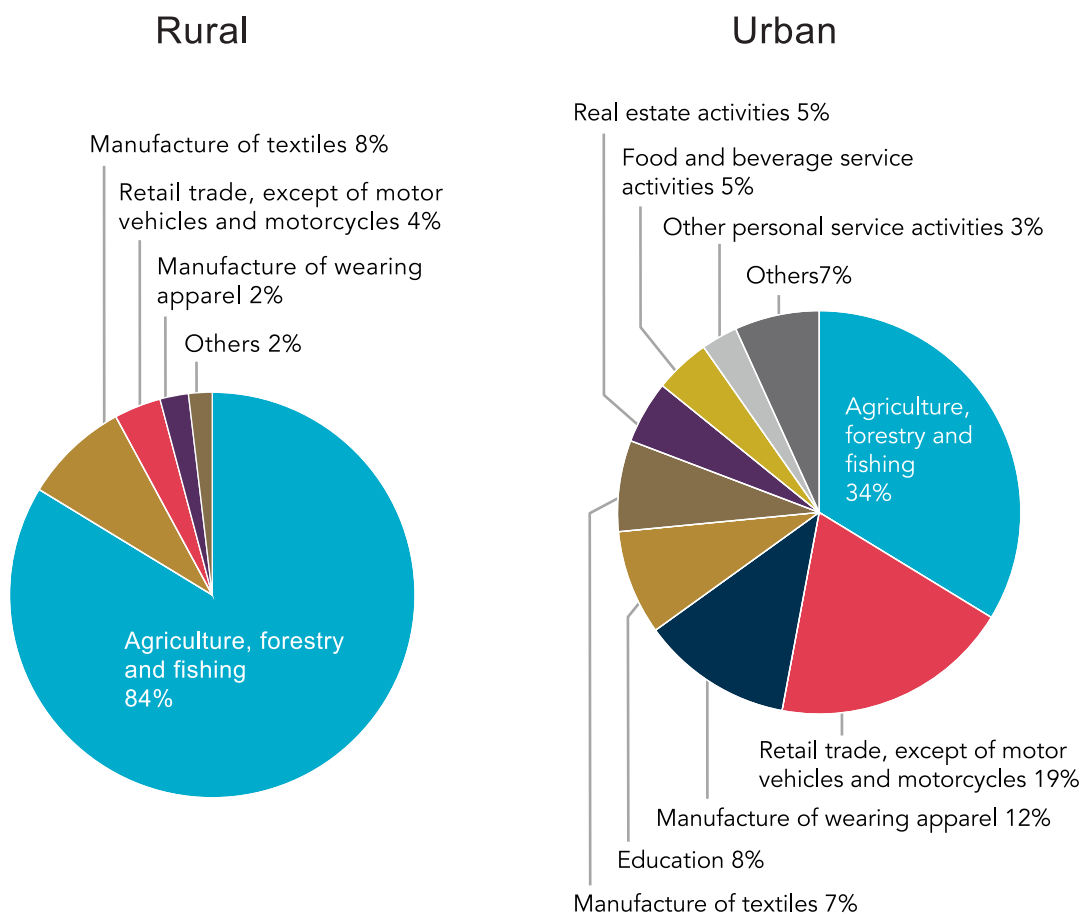


## Distribution of Self-employed Women Workers by Broad Industry Types

- Among self-employed women in rural Assam, over 83.7 per cent work in agriculture, followed by retail trade at 7.2 per cent, a pattern similar to the national distribution.
- The urban distribution of self-employed women is primarily concentrated in agricultural sector (33.7 per cent) and the retail trade (19 per cent).



Figure 6: Distribution of Self-employed Women Workforce by Broad Industry Types



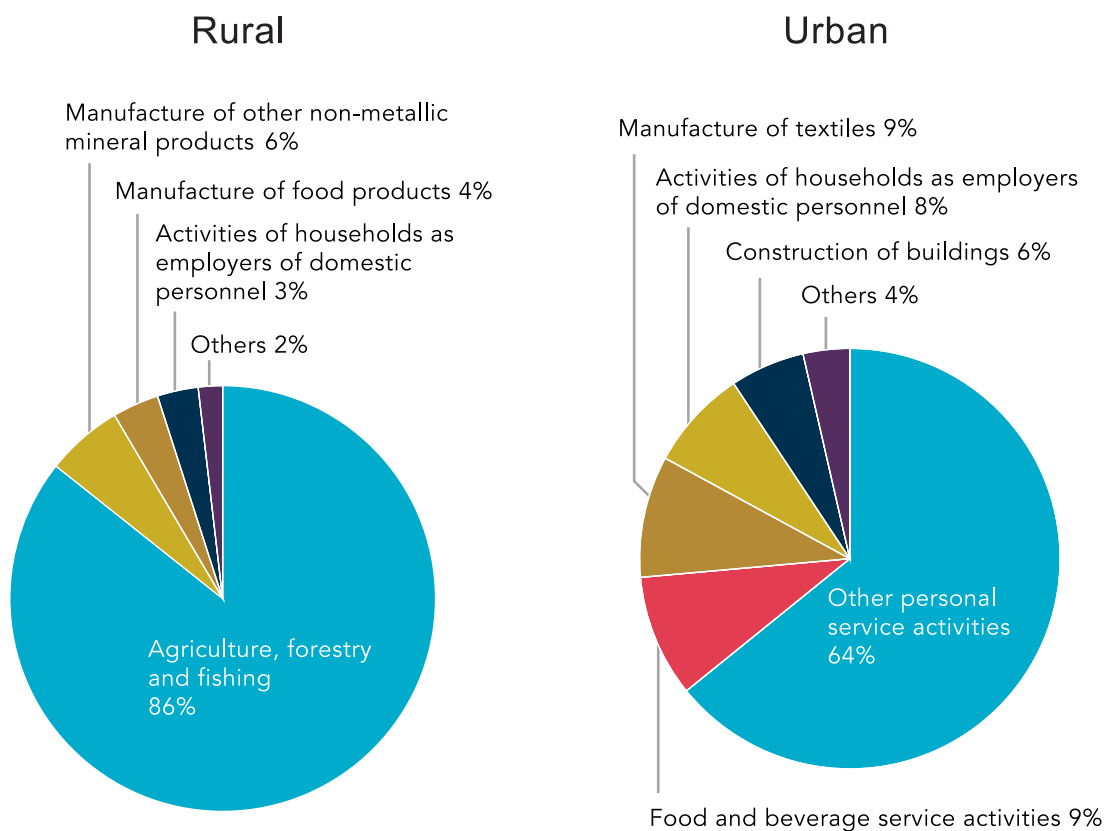
\*For ages 15 years and above

## Distribution of Casual Women Workers by Broad Industry Types

- In rural areas, 85.7 per cent of women in casual employment work in agriculture, and 5.8 per cent work in manufacturing of non-metallic products.
- In urban areas, 64.2 per cent of casual workers are employed in other personal services, followed by food and beverages sector, which accounts for 22.5 per cent.



Figure 7: Distribution of Casual Women Workforce by Broad Industry Types



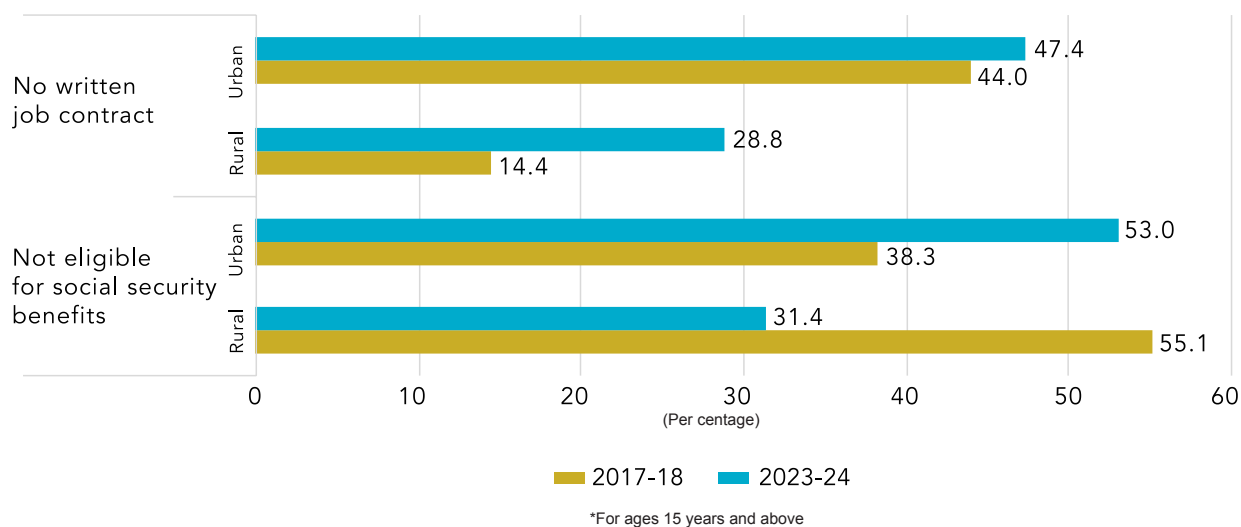
## Condition of Work in Regular Employment

- Over the past seven years, rural Assam has seen a significant decrease in the proportion of regularly salaried working women without social security benefits. The figure declined from 55.1 per cent in 2017-18 to 31.4 per cent in 2023-24. On the other hand there has been an increase in job insecurity, women without any written job contract increased from 14 to 29 per cent.
- In the urban region, the proportion of women without social and job security has increased from 38.3 to 53 per cent and 44 to 47 per cent respectively. Overall, indicating the deterioration in the condition of regular salaried women workers in the state.





Figure 8: Job and Social Security Benefits over the Years

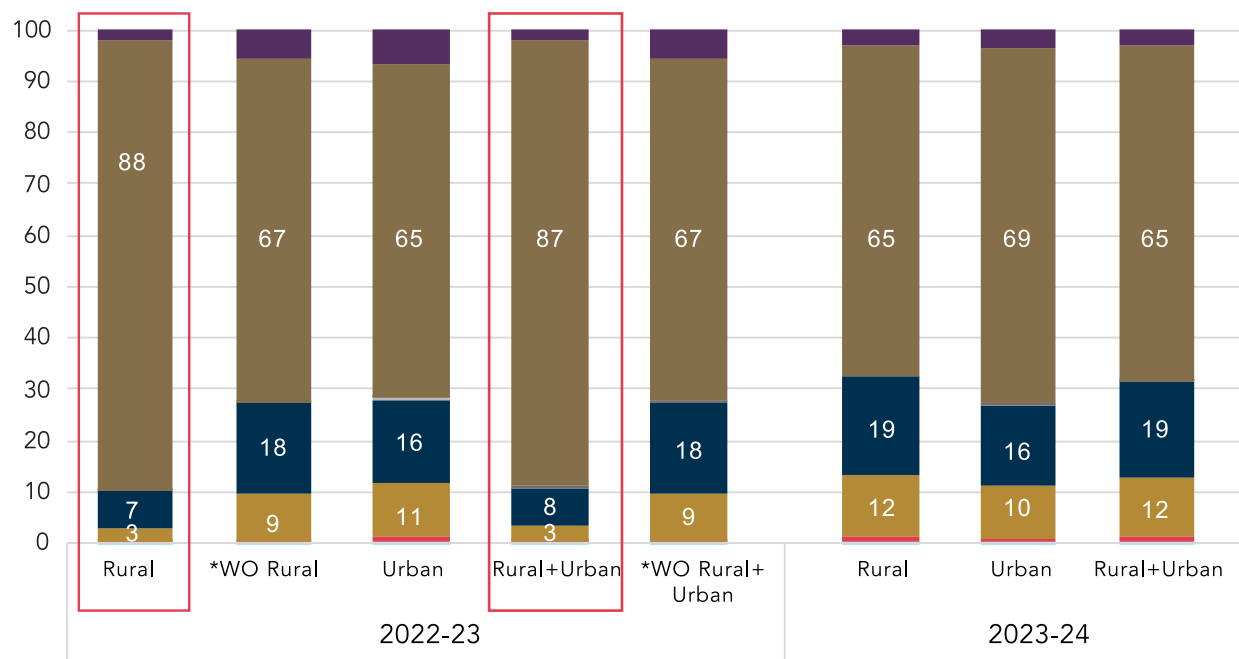


## Reason for Not Being in the Labour Force

- Similar to the national situation, the main reason for not being in the workforce is child care and domestic chores, which has slightly declined in the rural region of the state and slightly increased in urban region of the state within a year.
- As the error in the weight in three villages in rural Assam has overestimated the share in the citation of reason for not being in the labour force has reported much higher share of 88 per cent in 2022-23, as highlighted in red box.



Figure 9: Reason for Not in the Labour Force



\*WO-without error (estimates after correcting for error)

\*For ages 15 years and above

- Did not have the request train/qualification/age for work
- Health/age related reason
- Social reasons
- Child care/personal commitments in home making
- Non availability of work a convenient location
- Want to continue study
- Finacially well-off
- Others

## Conclusion

PLFS data reveals a substantial increase in Assam's FLFPR, mirroring the national trend with growth primarily concentrated in rural areas among self-employed women. This sharp rise becomes clearer after correcting for 2022-23 survey weighing errors. While the majority of these self-employed women are own-account workers, the significant proportion engaged in agriculture (84 per cent in rural, 34 per cent in urban) suggests potential distress within this self-employment. A consistent decline in casual employment is noted, despite Assam having a high casual labour share<sup>7</sup>. Currently, women in casual work are largely in agriculture (rural) and other personal services like domestic help (urban), indicating disguised and low-paying employment. Alarmingly, the share of regularly salaried women has drastically decreased, with a significant rise in urban employment lacking job and social security benefits between 2017-18 and 2023-24. This landscape of generally poor job quality, coupled with childcare and domestic responsibilities, remains a major barrier to women's labour market participation. Despite a perception of Assam as relatively 'liberal', gender norms regarding women's role in social reproduction align with national trends. Furthermore, NCEAR study indicates a higher female unemployment rate compared to males, suggesting a disadvantage for women both in finding jobs and within the workforce<sup>8</sup>. Consequently, evidence-based policies are urgently needed to facilitate greater female participation through improved childcare, better infrastructure, and opportunity-driven employment.



## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.dataforindia.com/plfs-assam/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.indiatodayne.in/assam/story/womens-workforce-participation-in-assam-surpasses-national-average-himanta-biswa-sarma-1189631-2025-03-26>

<sup>3</sup> <https://industriescom.assam.gov.in/portlets/schemes-for-self-employment>

<sup>4</sup> <https://skillmission.assam.gov.in/about-us/programme-initiatives#:~:text=2.,them%20secure%20a%20sustainable%20livelihood.>

<sup>5</sup> Note: The dip in Assam's female labour force participation in the PLFS round of 2022-23 was due to a known sampling weight error in a few villages. In order to make these corrections, the problematic FSU in 2022-23 is removed. Doing so has no implications on the precision of the state-wide estimates. After making these adjustments, LFPR estimates don't show a sudden jump much like before.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.dataforindia.com/plfs-assam/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://ceda.ashoka.edu.in/how-does-labour-force-participation-vary-across-indian-states/>

<sup>8</sup> [https://des.assam.gov.in/sites/default/files/swf\\_utility\\_folder/departments/ecostat\\_medhassu\\_in\\_oid\\_3/this\\_comm/women\\_condition\\_report\\_2025\\_03\\_27\\_new.pdf](https://des.assam.gov.in/sites/default/files/swf_utility_folder/departments/ecostat_medhassu_in_oid_3/this_comm/women_condition_report_2025_03_27_new.pdf)





Institute for What Works to Advance Gender Equality

**IWWAGE – An Initiative of LEAD at Krea University**

Block M 6, Second Floor, Kharera, Hauz Khas New Delhi, Delhi - 110016

+91-11-49403983 | [www.iwwage.org](http://www.iwwage.org)