

TRENDS IN FEMALE LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION

BIHAR



This series of state factsheets highlights key aspects of women's employment across states, drawing on secondary data from the National Statistical Office's Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS). The analysis incorporates the latest calendar year-based PLFS data (January–December, 2025), along with the earlier calendar year data for 2022, 2023, and 2024 to capture recent trends in women's employment. It is important to note that recent PLFS estimates are affected by revisions in survey methodology and sampling design introduced from January 2025, including expanded sample coverage and changes in stratification and rotational sampling. While these revisions improve representativeness and reliability, caution is required when comparing trends across pre- and post-revision periods.

Introduction

Bihar is one of India's most populous and fastest-growing states, with a Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) estimated at ₹9,91,997 crore at current prices in 2024-25, reflecting real growth of 8.6% outpacing the national GDP growth rate of 6.5% for the same period.[1] Despite this impressive economic trajectory, Bihar's per capita income remains the lowest among Indian states, standing at approximately 31.7% of the national average at constant prices. The state's economy is predominantly services-driven, with the tertiary sector accounting for around 54.8% of GSDP, followed by the secondary sector (26.8%) and the primary sector (18.3%). Agriculture, forestry, and allied activities nonetheless remain the dominant source of employment, particularly for women and rural households.

The persistence of low female labour force participation despite economic growth points to both supply-side constraints and limited access to suitable employment opportunities. Recent reporting highlights Bihar's high youth unemployment and particularly low participation among young women, while employment remains concentrated in agriculture and informal work.[2] At the same time, sociocultural norms, limited access to education and skills, mobility constraints, inadequate transport and care responsibilities can restrict women's ability to access available work. Against this backdrop, this factsheet examines trends in female labour force participation, workforce composition, sectoral distribution and working conditions in Bihar.



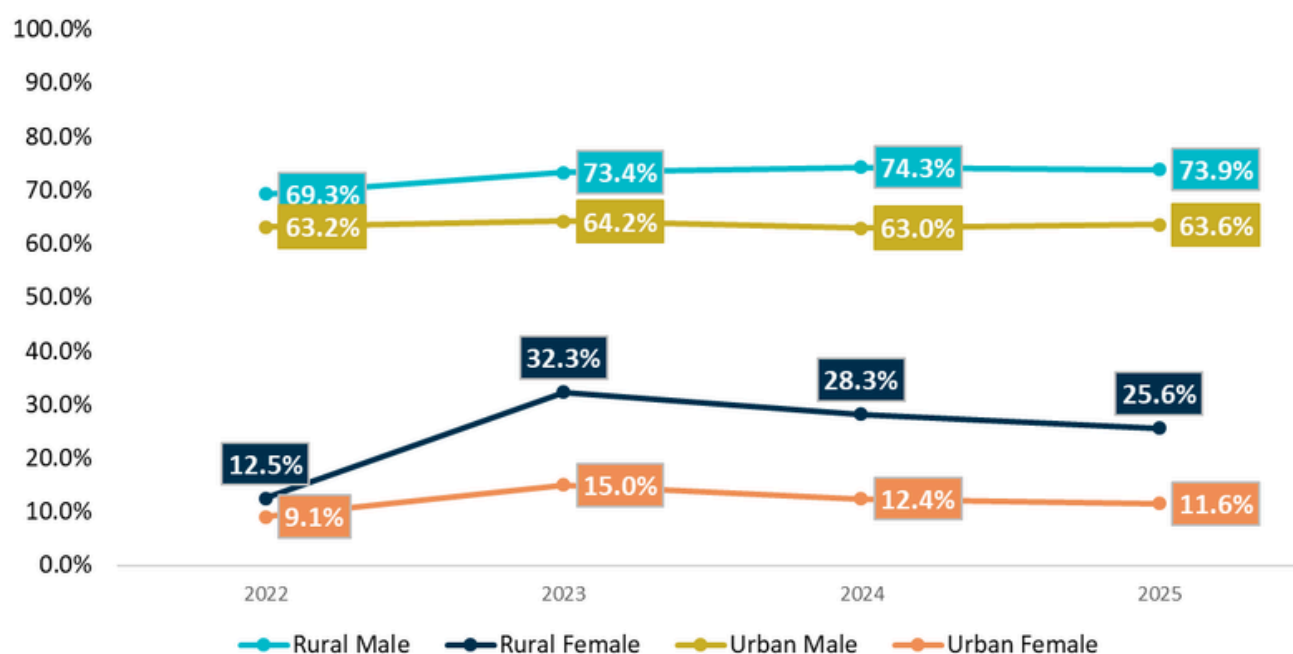
Trends in Female Workforce and Labour Force Participation Rates

- The Worker Population Ratio (WPR) in Bihar shows fluctuations between 2022 and 2025, with significant gender and rural-urban disparities. Male WPR remains relatively high and stable, increasing slightly in rural areas (69.3% to 73.9%) and staying around 63-64% in urban areas. Female WPR rises sharply in 2023, particularly in rural areas (12.5% to 32.3%), before declining to 25.6% by 2025. Urban female WPR follows a similar pattern, increasing from 9.1% to 15.0% in 2023 and settling at 11.6% in 2025. Overall, women's participation remains higher than in 2022, but large gender gaps persist across both rural and urban areas.

[1] Harsh, H. (2026, February 3). Bihar outpaces India's GDP growth: State economy hits record Rs 9.9 lakh crore as manufacturing surges. Indian Express. <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/bihar-outpaces-indias-gdp-growth-state-economy-hits-record-rs-9-9-lakh-crore-as-manufacturing-surges-10510007/>

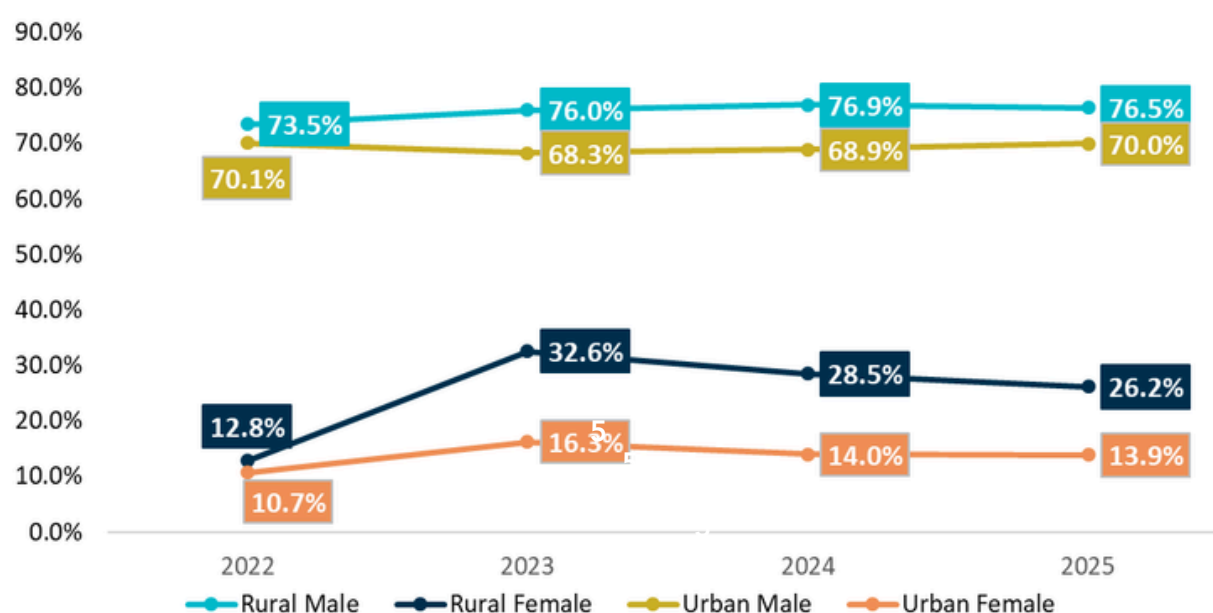
[2] Upasani, Siddharth. "After Cash, Why Bihar's Women Need Long-term Plan From Nitish Kumar." The Indian Express, November 27, 2025. <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-economics/bihar-women-cash-long-term-plan-nitish-10383064/>

Figure 1: Trends in WPR (15 Years and Above)



- The Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) in Bihar shows a pattern broadly similar to the all-India trend, with increases in participation between 2022 and 2025 alongside persistent gender and rural-urban gaps. Male LFPR remains high and relatively stable, rising modestly in rural areas (73.5% to 76.5%) and remaining around 68-70% in urban areas. Female LFPR records a sharp increase in 2023, particularly in rural areas (12.8% to 32.6%), followed by a gradual decline to 26.2% in 2025. Urban female LFPR also rises from 10.7% in 2022 to 16.3% in 2023 before stabilizing at around 14% in 2024-2025. While Bihar mirrors the national trend of improved female labour force participation after 2022, female LFPR levels remain substantially lower than the all-India average, especially in rural areas.

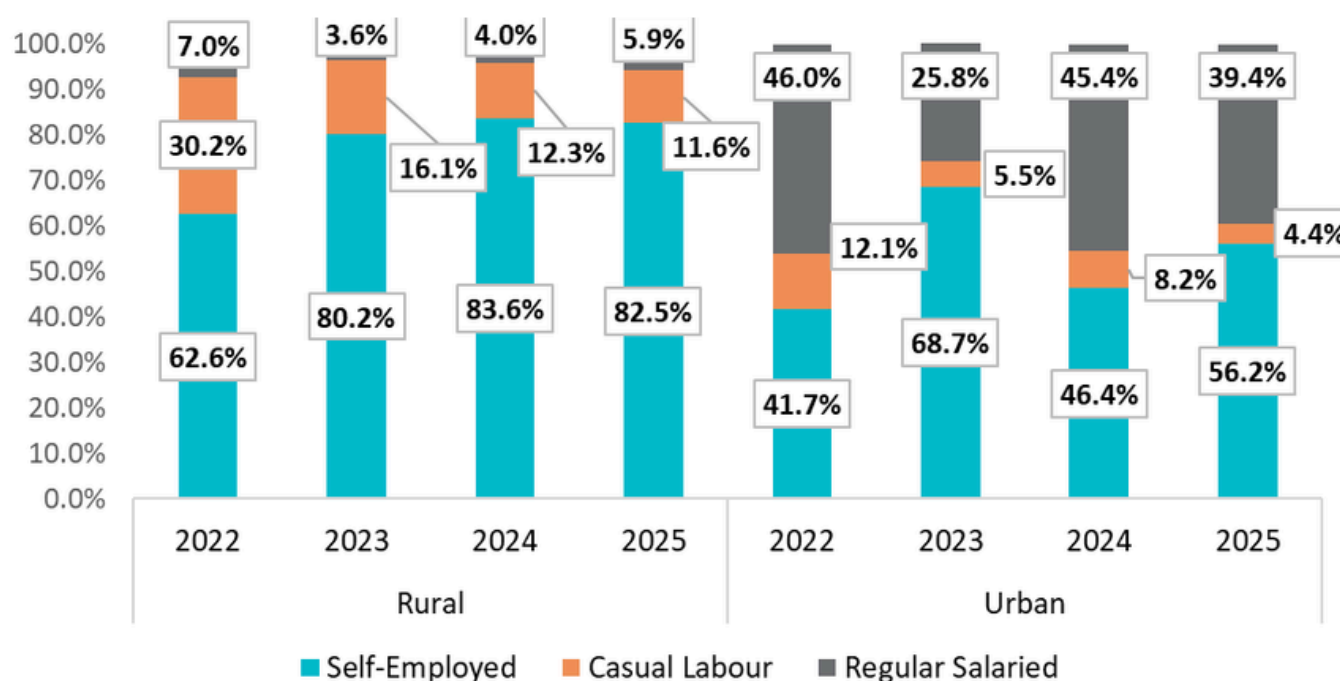
Figure 2: Trends in LFPR (15 Years and Above)



A: Composition of Female Workforce

- Self-employment is the dominant form of employment for women in Bihar, especially in rural areas, where its share rises sharply from 62.6% in 2022 to 82.5% in 2025. In urban areas, it also increases overall from 41.7% to 56.2%. Compared to India, Bihar shows a much stronger reliance on self-employment.
- Casual labour is the second-largest employment category for rural women but declines significantly from 30.2% in 2022 to 11.6% in 2025. In urban areas, it remains low and falls from 12.1% to 4.4%. This broadly mirrors the all-India trend of declining casual labour.
- Regular salaried work accounts for a small share of rural female employment, fluctuating between 3.6% and 7.0%. In urban areas, it remains important but declines overall from 46.0% in 2022 to 39.4% in 2025. Overall, the shift towards self-employment is more pronounced in Bihar, while regular salaried employment remains limited both in Bihar and nationally.

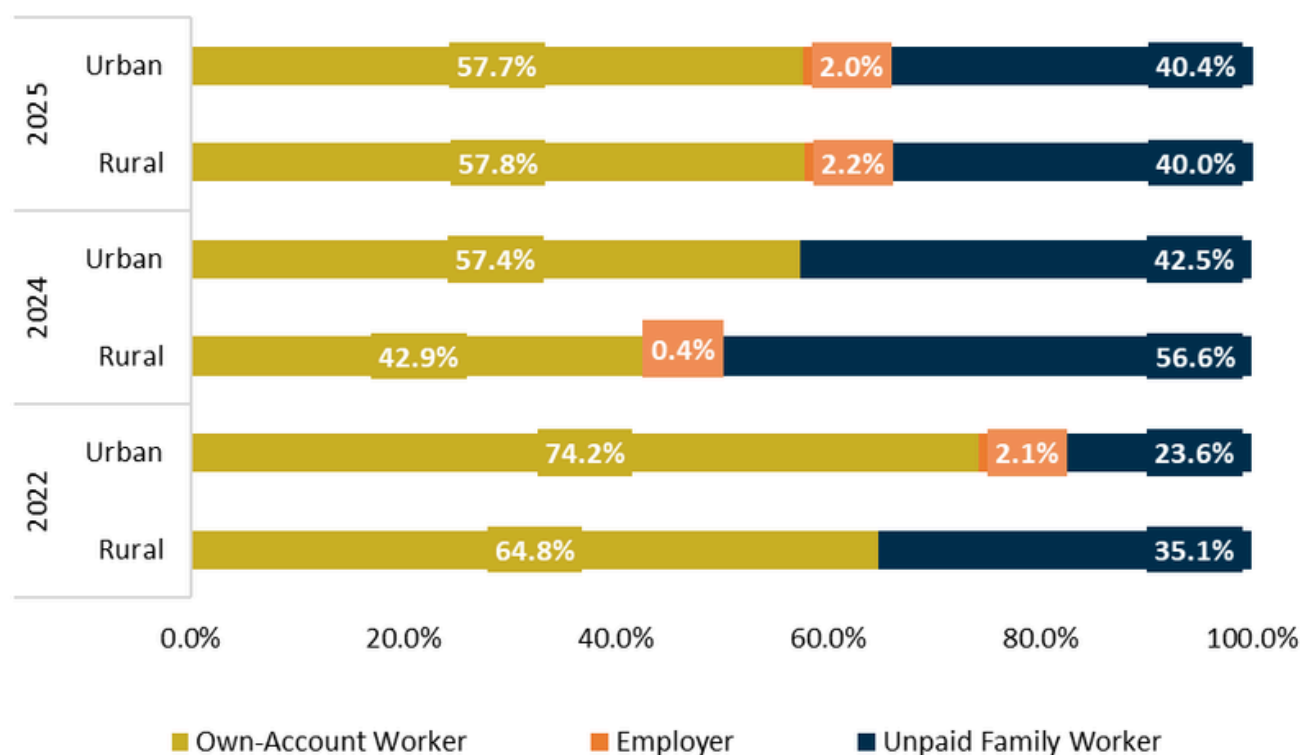
Figure 3: Type of Employment



- Among self-employed women in Bihar, own-account work remains the largest category, accounting for 57.8% of rural and 57.7% of urban self-employment in 2025. Unlike the all-India trend of a steady rise, Bihar shows greater fluctuations, particularly in rural areas.
- The share of women working as employers remains negligible in both rural and urban areas, staying below 3% throughout the period, similar to the national pattern.

- Unpaid family work constitutes a substantial share of female self-employment, rising sharply in 2024 before declining to around 40% in both rural and urban areas by 2025. Compared to India, Bihar has a lower share of unpaid family workers in rural areas but a higher dependence on unpaid family work in urban areas.

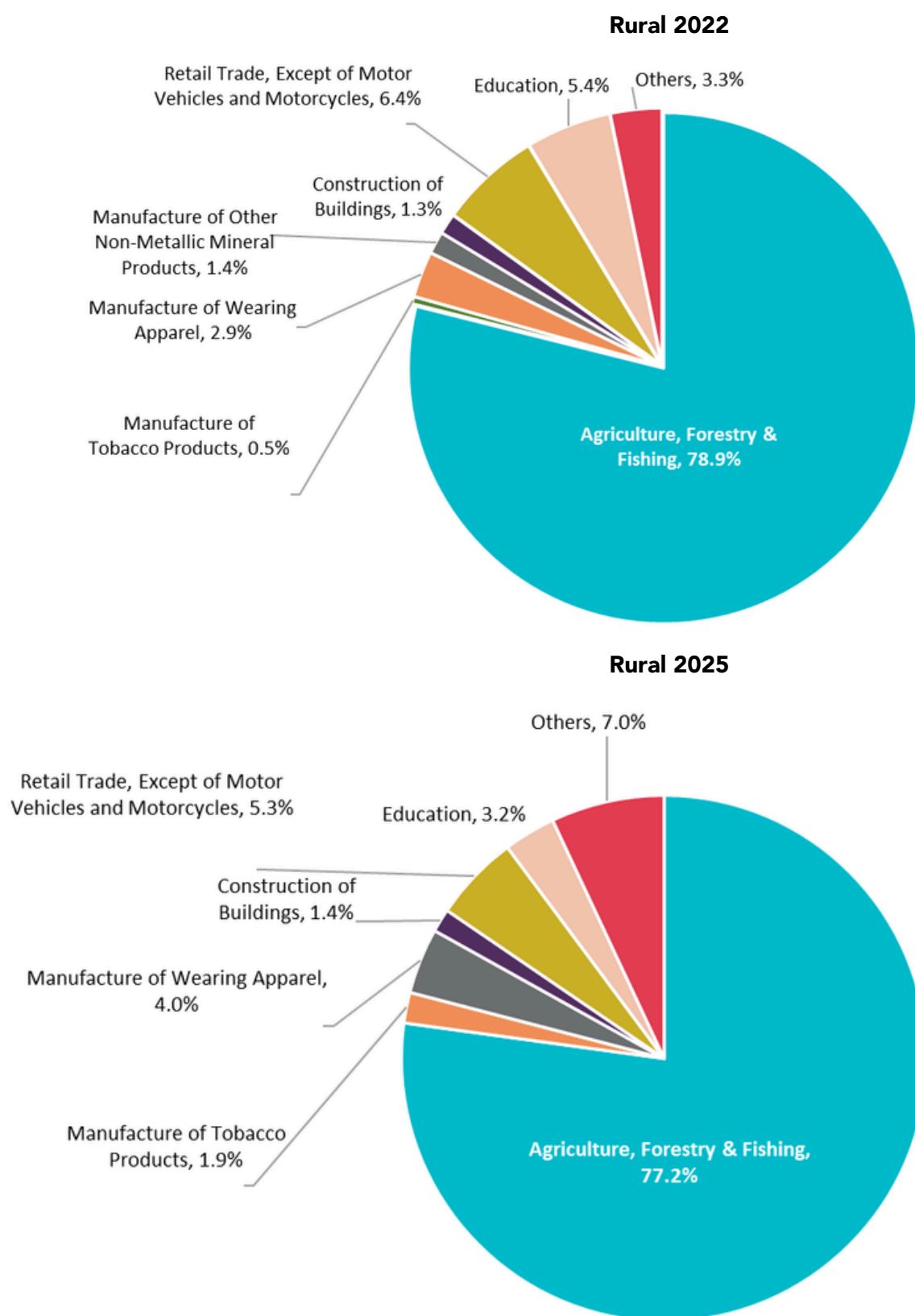
Figure 4: Distribution among Self-Employed Women



B: Distribution of Women Workers by Broad Industry Divisions

- Rural employment in Bihar remained overwhelmingly concentrated in agriculture, forestry and fishing, although its share declined marginally from 78.9% in 2022 to 77.2% in 2025. Over the same period, there was a modest diversification of employment, with increases in manufacturing activities such as wearing apparel (2.9% to 4.0%) and tobacco products (0.5% to 1.9%). The share of employment in retail trade and education declined, while construction remained largely stable.

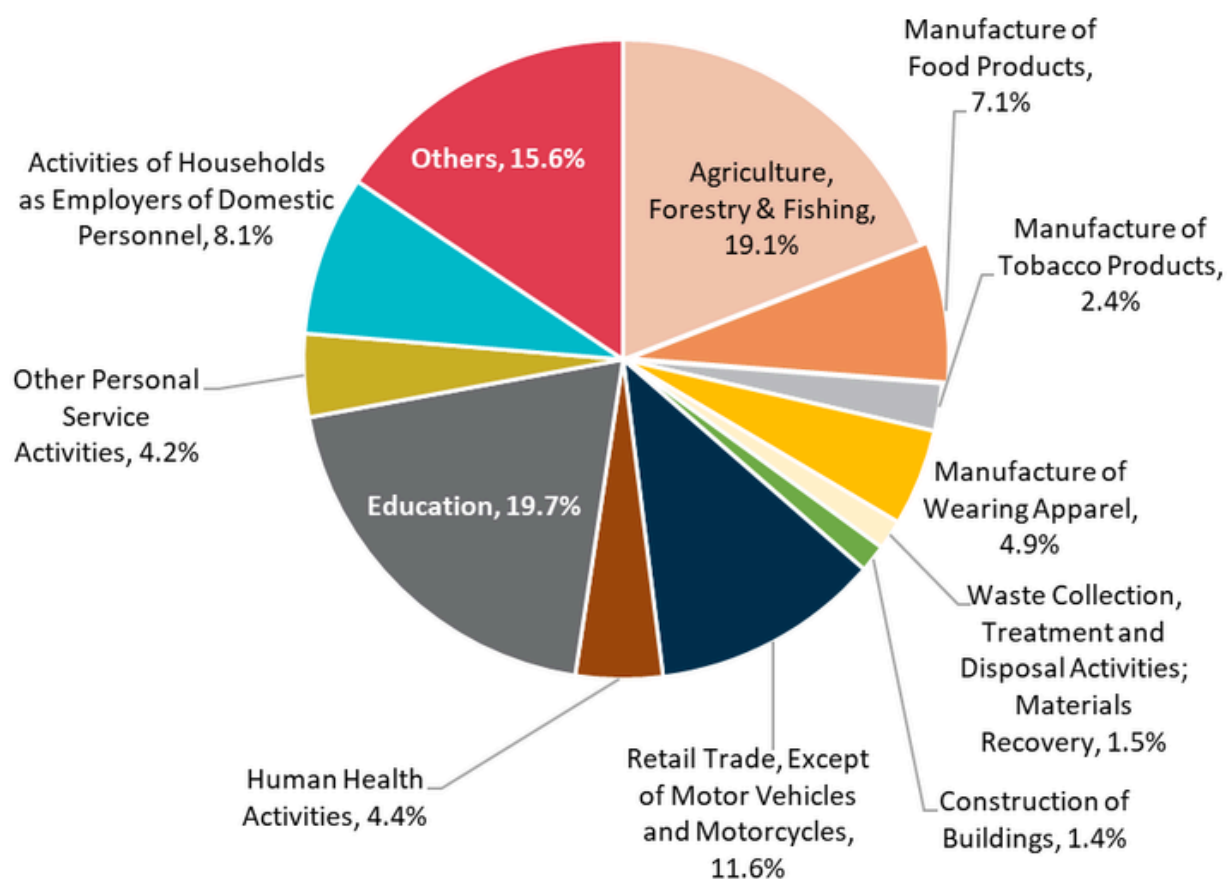
Figure 5A: Distribution of Women Workers by Broad Industry Divisions (Rural)



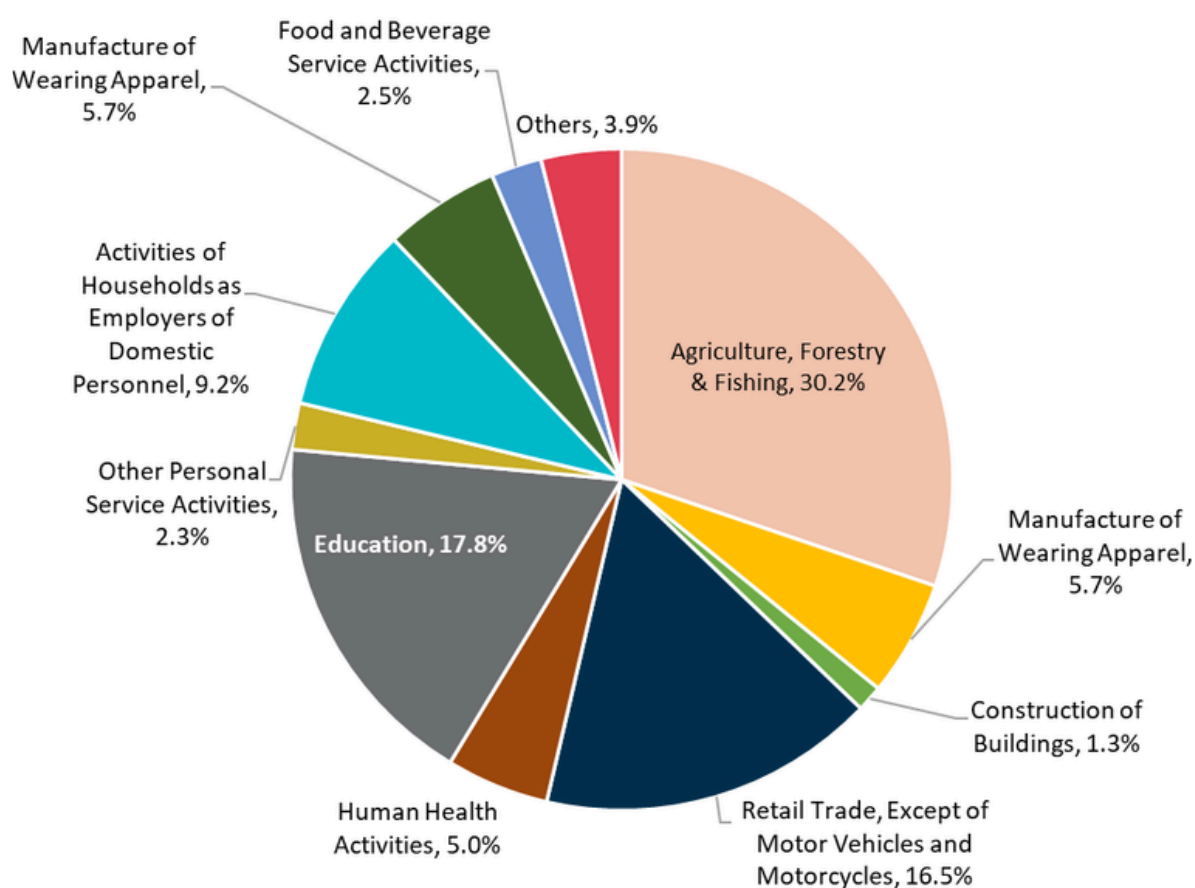
- Urban employment in Bihar witnessed a noticeable shift between 2022 and 2025, with the share of women employed in agriculture, forestry and fishing increasing substantially from 19.1% to 30.2%. Retail trade also expanded significantly, rising from 11.6% to 16.5%, while employment in households as employers of domestic personnel increased modestly from 8.1% to 9.2%. In contrast, the share of employment in education declined slightly from 19.7% to 17.8%, though it remained one of the largest sectors.

Figure 5B: Distribution of Women Workers by Broad Industry Divisions (Urban)

Urban 2022



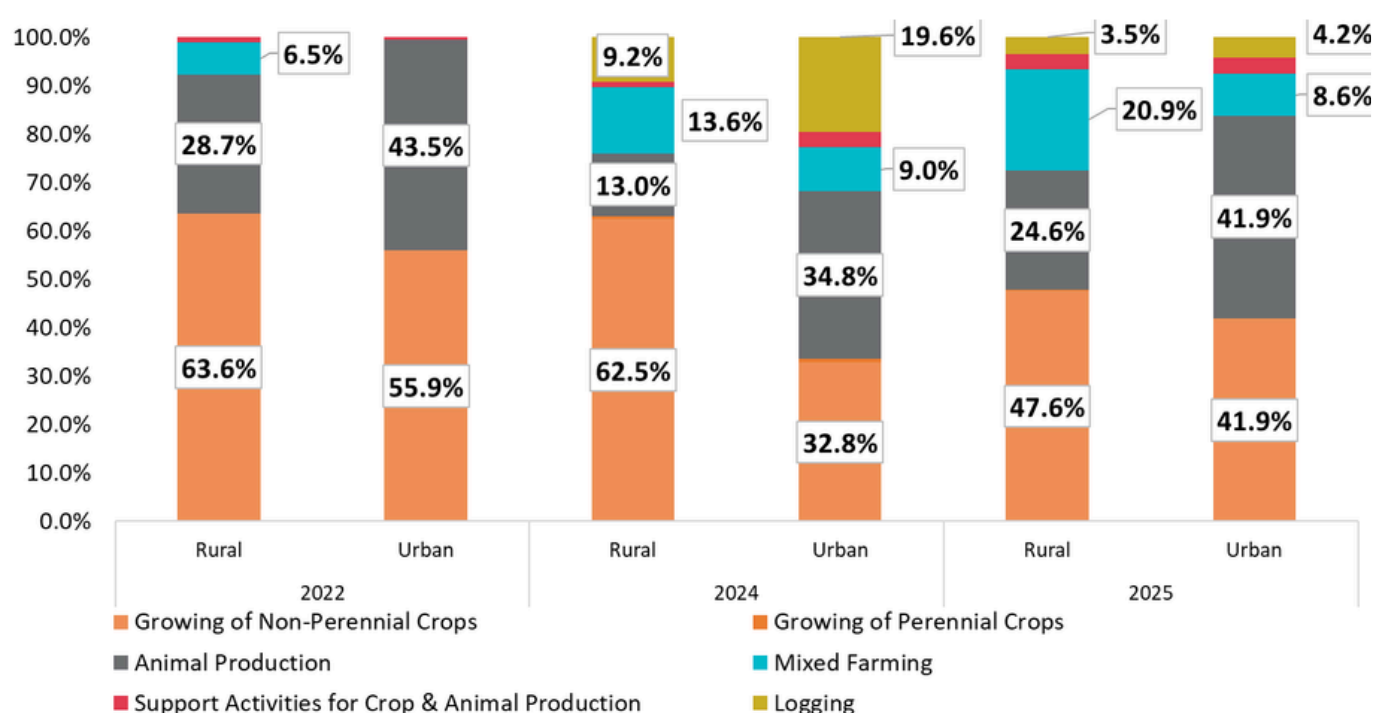
Urban 2025



C: Distribution of Women Workers Within Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing

- In rural Bihar, women's work within agriculture remains concentrated in growing non-perennial crops, though its share declines from 63.6% in 2022 to 47.6% in 2025. At the same time, animal production remains important and mixed farming increases substantially from 6.5% to 20.9%, indicating a gradual diversification of agricultural activities beyond crop cultivation.
- In urban Bihar, women's agricultural employment is almost equally divided between growing non-perennial crops and animal production (41.9% each in 2025). Infact, the share engaged in non-perennial crop cultivation declines from 55.9% in 2022, while animal production remains broadly stable. Mixed farming and support activities also increase modestly, indicating some diversification of agricultural livelihoods.

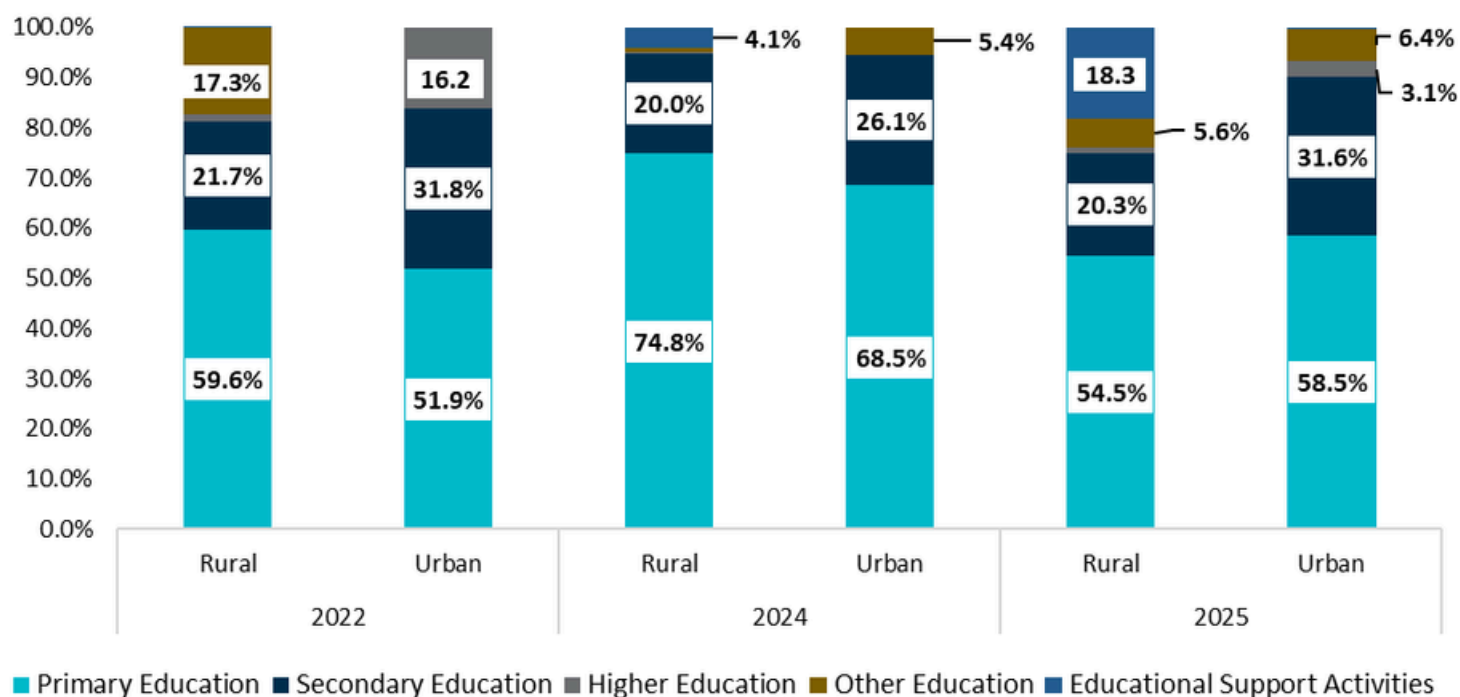
Figure 6: Distribution of Women Workers within Agriculture and Allied Activities



D: Distribution of women workers within Education

- In rural Bihar, women's employment in education is concentrated in primary education, which accounts for more than half of all education-sector jobs throughout the period, despite fluctuations between 59.6% in 2022 and 54.5% in 2025. Secondary education remains relatively stable at around one-fifth of employment, while educational support activities emerge as an important category by 2025, accounting for 18.3% of employment.
- In urban Bihar, primary education also remains the largest source of employment, increasing from 51.9% in 2022 to 58.5% in 2025. Secondary education consistently accounts for around one-third of education-sector employment, while higher education declines sharply from 16.2% to 3.1%.

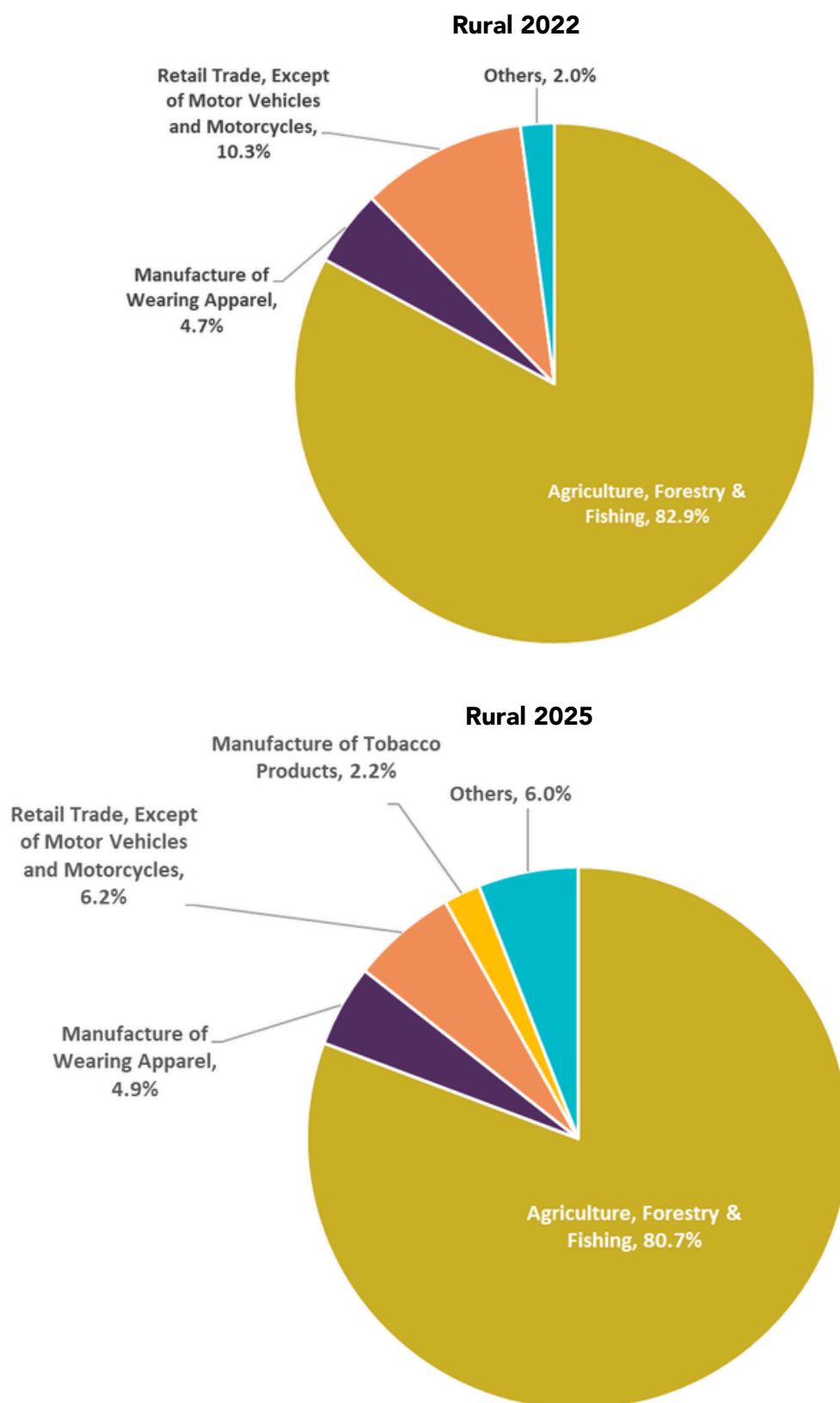
Figure 7: Distribution of women workers within Education



E: Distribution of Self-Employed Women Workers by Broad Industry Types

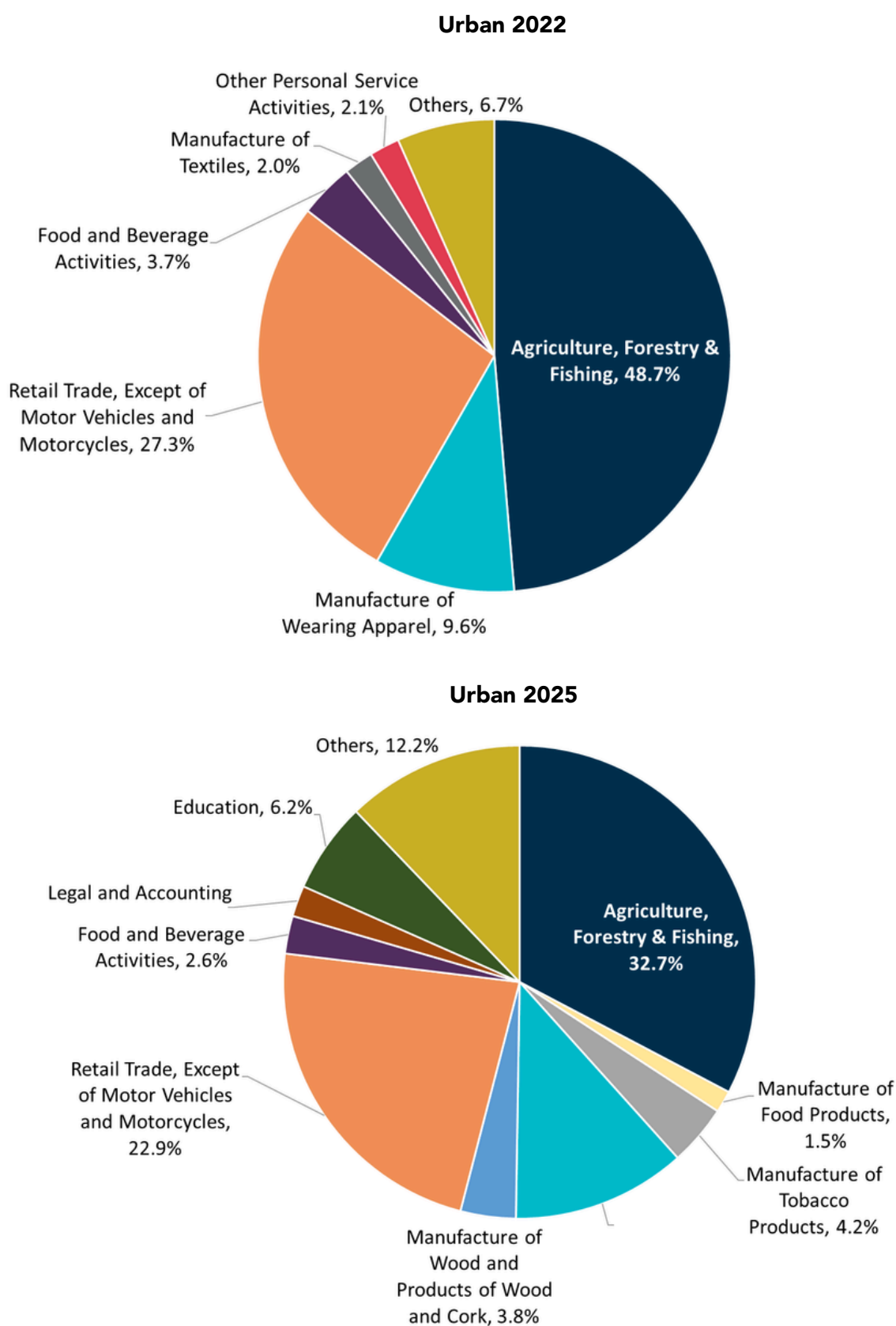
- Rural self-employed women in Bihar remain overwhelmingly concentrated in agriculture, forestry and fishing, although its share declines slightly from 82.9% in 2022 to 80.7% in 2025. Retail trade, the second-largest sector in 2022, sees a notable decline from 10.3% to 6.2%, while employment in tobacco manufacturing emerges as a small but growing activity, rising to 2.2% by 2025.

Figure 8A: Distribution of Self-employed women by Broad Industry Types (Rural)



- Among self-employed urban women in Bihar, agriculture, forestry and fishing emerges as the largest sector, increasing substantially from 32.7% in 2022 to 48.7% in 2025. Retail trade also expands from 22.9% to 27.3%, reinforcing its importance as a source of urban self-employment. In contrast, the share of women engaged in wearing apparel manufacturing declines slightly from 11.9% to 9.6%.

Figure 8B: Distribution of Self-employed women by Broad Industry Types (Urban)

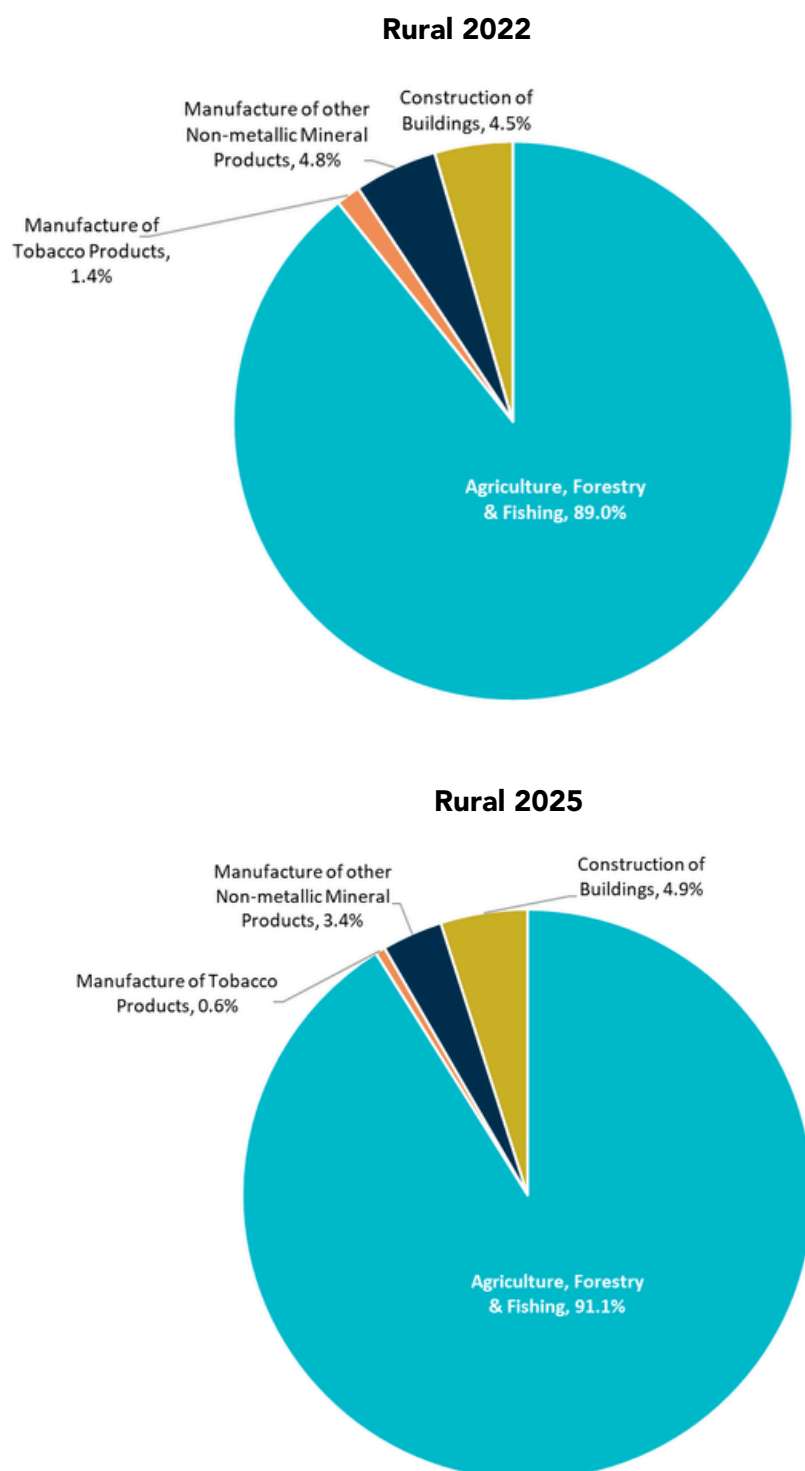


F: Distribution of Casual Women Workers by Broad Industry Types

- Between 2022 and 2025, casual employment among rural women in Bihar remained overwhelmingly concentrated in agriculture, forestry and fishing, with its share increasing from 89.0% to 91.1%. Construction accounted for a small but stable share, rising marginally from 4.5% to 4.9%,

while employment in non-metallic mineral products and tobacco manufacturing declined. Unlike the all-India trend, which shows a gradual diversification of casual employment towards construction and other non-farm activities, Bihar's rural female casual workforce became even more concentrated in agriculture over the period.

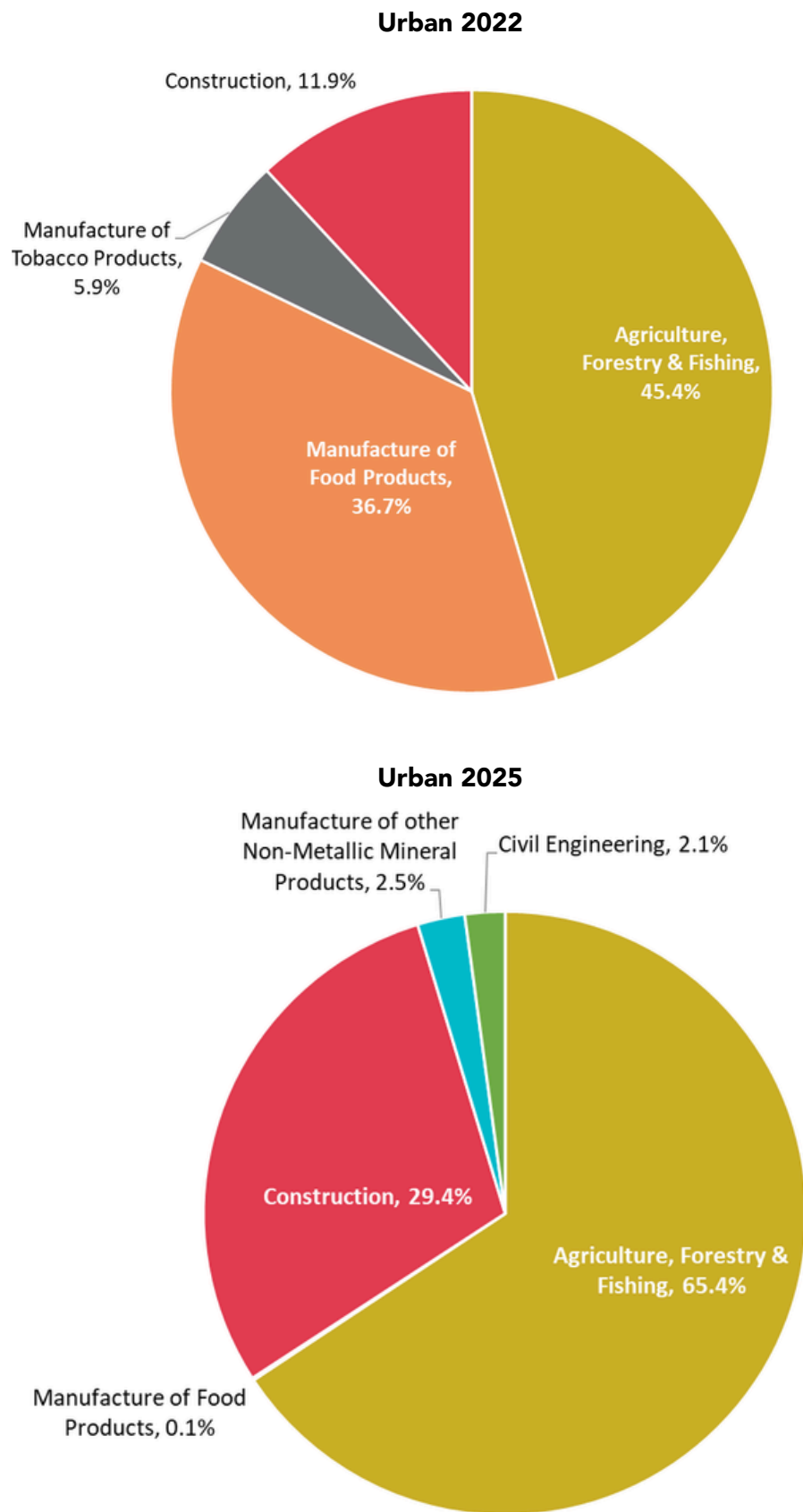
Figure 9A: Distribution of Casual Women Workers by Broad Industry Types (Rural)



- Between 2022 and 2025, casual employment among urban women in Bihar became increasingly concentrated in agriculture, forestry and fishing, with its share rising sharply from 45.4% to 65.4%. Employment in construction also expanded substantially, accounting for nearly 30% of casual employment in 2025,

while food products and tobacco manufacturing, which were important in 2022, no longer featured among the major sectors. Compared to the all-India pattern, Bihar shows a much stronger concentration of urban casual employment in agriculture.

Figure 9B: Distribution of Casual Women Workers by Broad Industry Types (Urban)

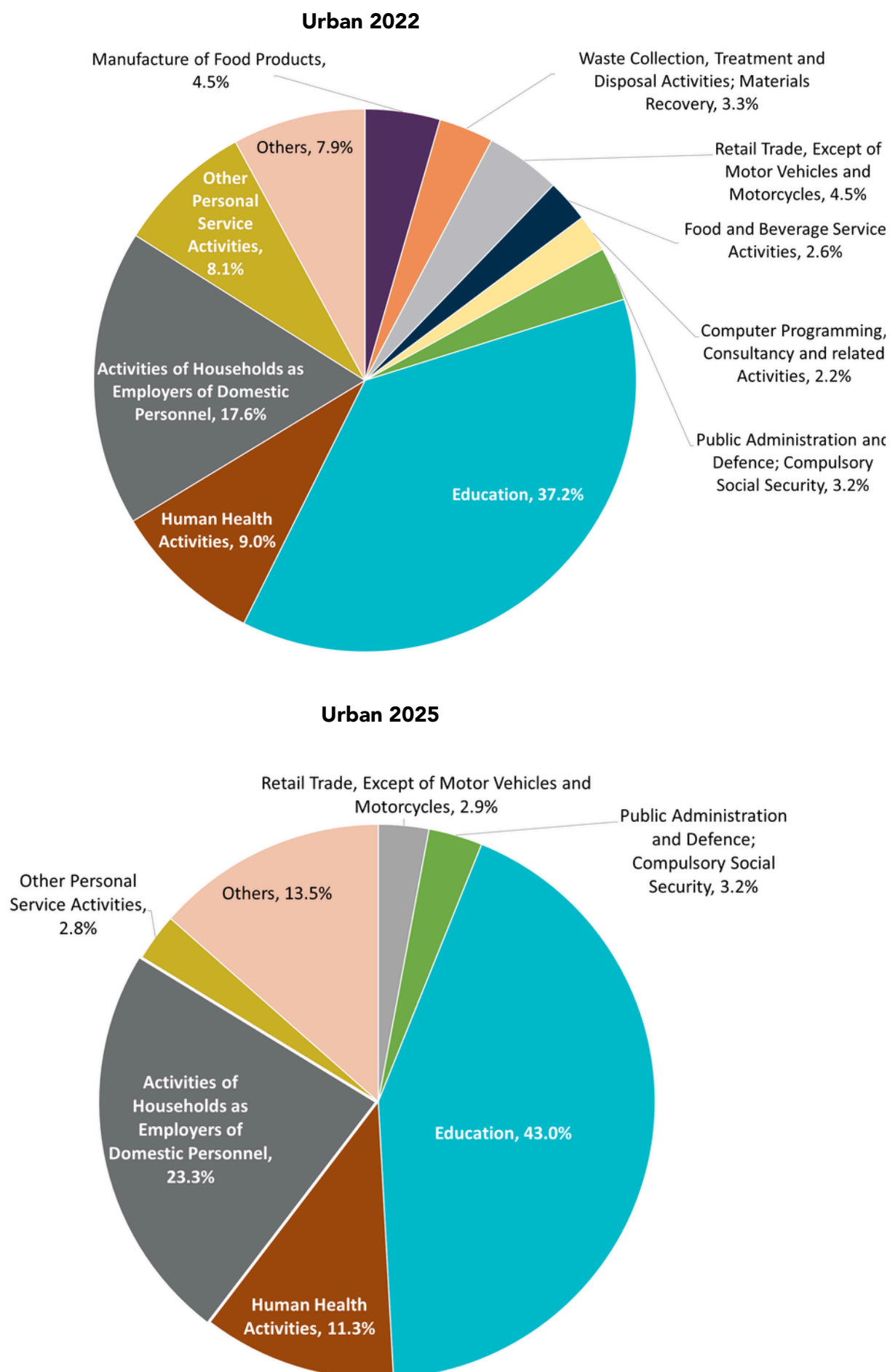


G: Distribution of Regular Salaried Women Workers by Broad Industry Types⁴

- Between 2022 and 2025, regular salaried employment among urban women in Bihar remained heavily concentrated in education, whose share increased from 37.2% to 43.0%, making it a far more dominant employer than at the all-India level. Human health activities also expanded from 9.0% to 11.3%, reinforcing the importance of care-sector employment. Employment in households as employers of domestic personnel rose substantially from 17.6% to 23.3%, in contrast to the national trend of a declining share in domestic work.
- Public administration remained stable at 3.2%, while retail trade and other personal services declined over the period. Overall, compared to India, Bihar's urban female regular salaried workforce is much more concentrated in education, health, and domestic services, with relatively limited participation in retail, financial, and knowledge-intensive sectors.

⁴The sectoral disaggregation of regular salaried employment is presented for urban areas only. The share of regular salaried workers among rural women remains very small making industry-level disaggregation statistically unreliable and analytically less meaningful.

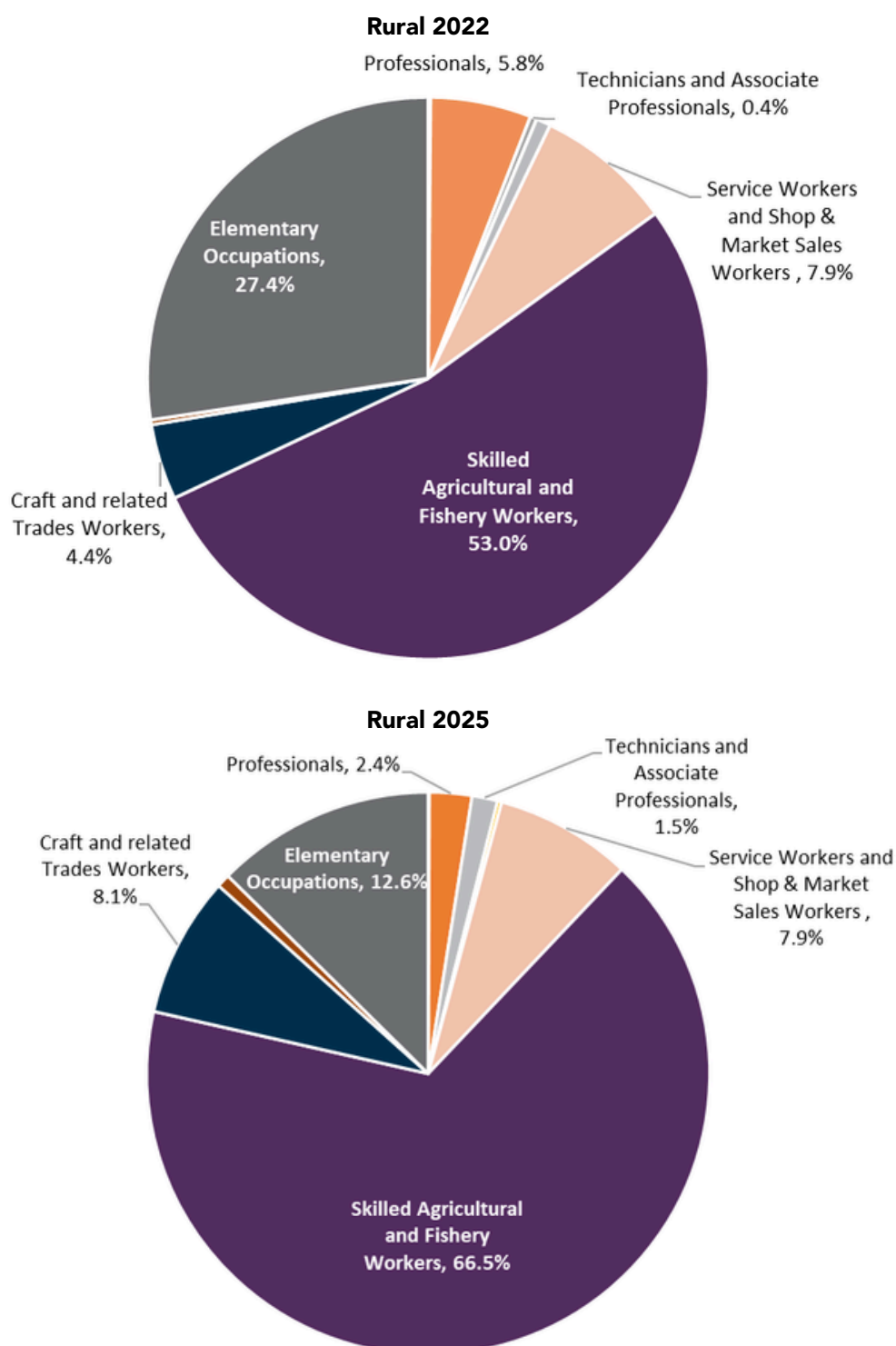
Figure 10: Distribution of Regular Salaried Women Workers by Broad Industry Types (Urban)



H: Disribution of Women Workers by Occupation Types

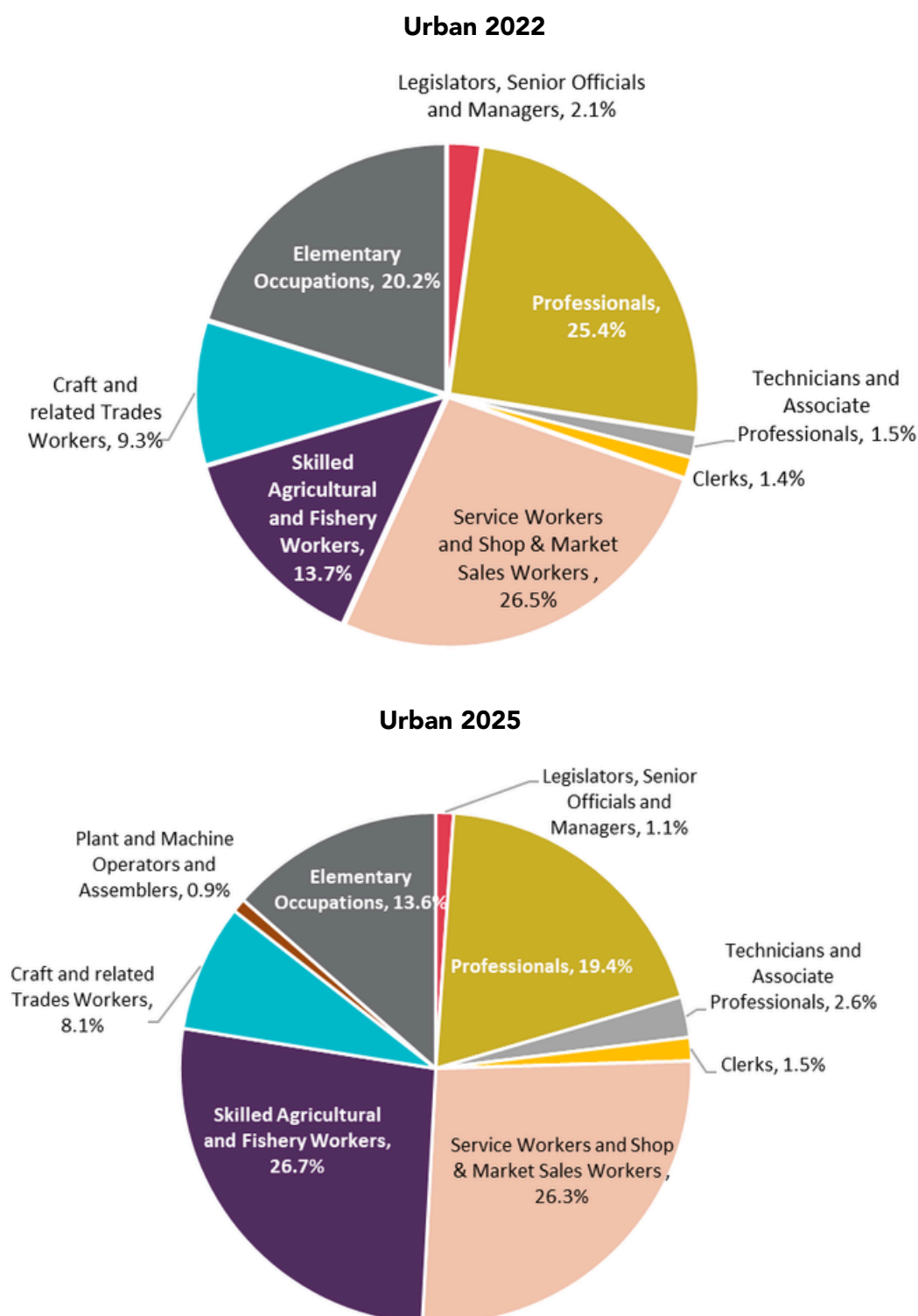
- Between 2022 and 2025, the occupational distribution of rural women workers in Bihar became more concentrated in agriculture, with the share of skilled agricultural and fishery workers increasing from 53.0% to 66.5%. At the same time, the share of women in elementary occupations declined sharply from 27.4% to 12.6%, while craft and related trades workers increased from 4.4% to 8.1%. Most other occupational categories, including professionals, clerks, and machine operators, accounted for only a small share of employment. Overall, the trend points towards a growing concentration of rural women's work in agricultural occupations, with limited diversification into non-farm occupations.

Figure 11A: Occupational Classification of Women Workers (Rural)



- Between 2022 and 2025, the occupational distribution of urban women workers in Bihar shifted towards agriculture, with the share of skilled agricultural and fishery workers nearly doubling from 13.7% to 26.7%. Service workers and shop and market sales workers remained the largest occupational group, accounting for around 26% of employment throughout the period. The shares of professionals and elementary occupations declined from 25.4% to 19.4% and from 20.2% to 13.6%, respectively, while other occupational categories remained relatively small. Overall, urban women's employment became more concentrated in service and agricultural occupations, alongside a decline in professional and elementary work.

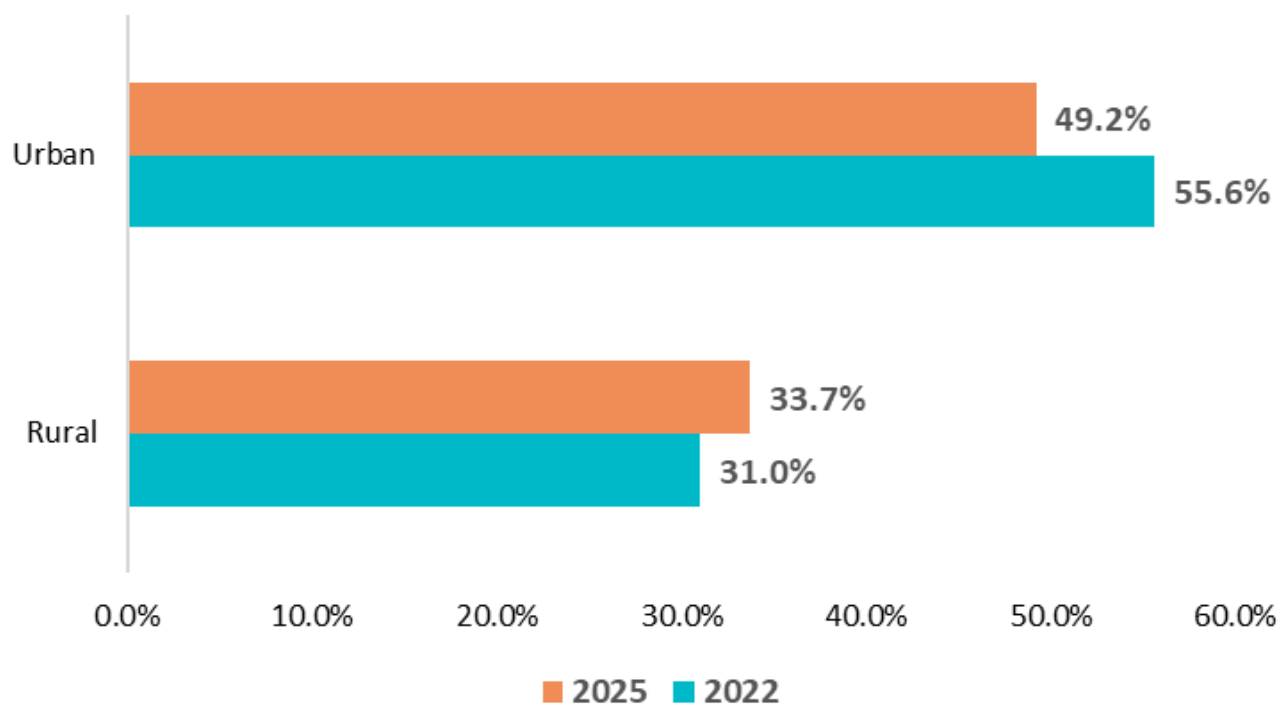
Figure 11B: Occupational Classification of Women Workers (Urban)



I: Condition of Work in Regular Employment

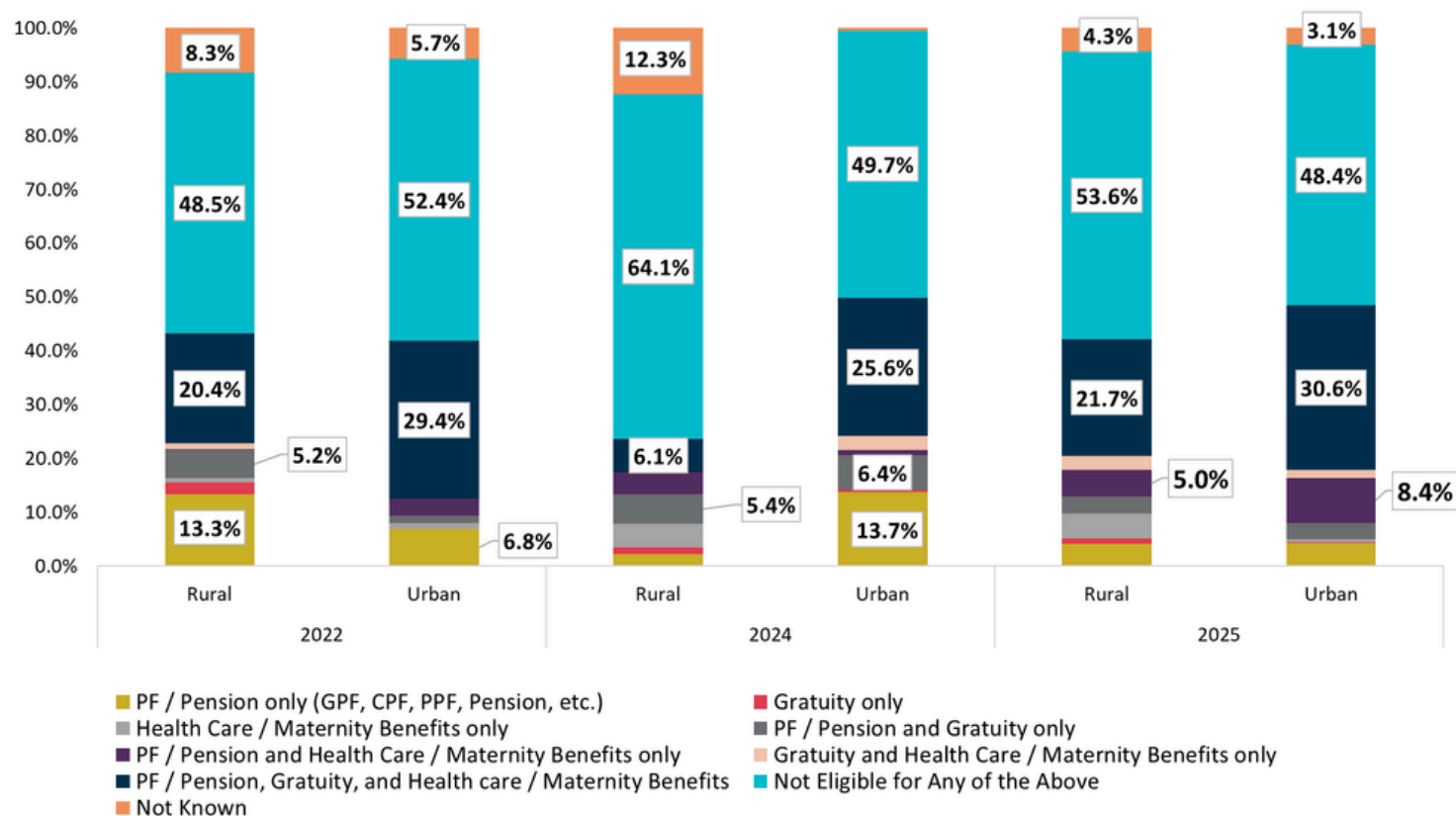
- The share of women workers without a written job contract remained high in Bihar. In rural areas, it increased slightly from 31.0% in 2022 to 33.7% in 2025, while in urban areas it declined from 55.6% to 49.2%. Despite some improvement in urban areas, a large proportion of women workers continued to be employed without written contracts, indicating persistent informality and job insecurity.

Figure 12: Status of Job Contract



- A large share of women workers in Bihar remained without access to social security benefits throughout the period. In 2025, 53.6% of rural and 48.4% of urban women workers were not eligible for any major benefit, although the urban share declined slightly from 52.4% in 2022.
- Among those receiving benefits, the most common arrangement was access to PF/pension, gratuity, and health or maternity benefits together, covering 21.7% of rural and 30.6% of urban women workers in 2025. Overall, while urban women had somewhat better social security coverage than rural women, access to employment benefits remained limited for a majority of workers.

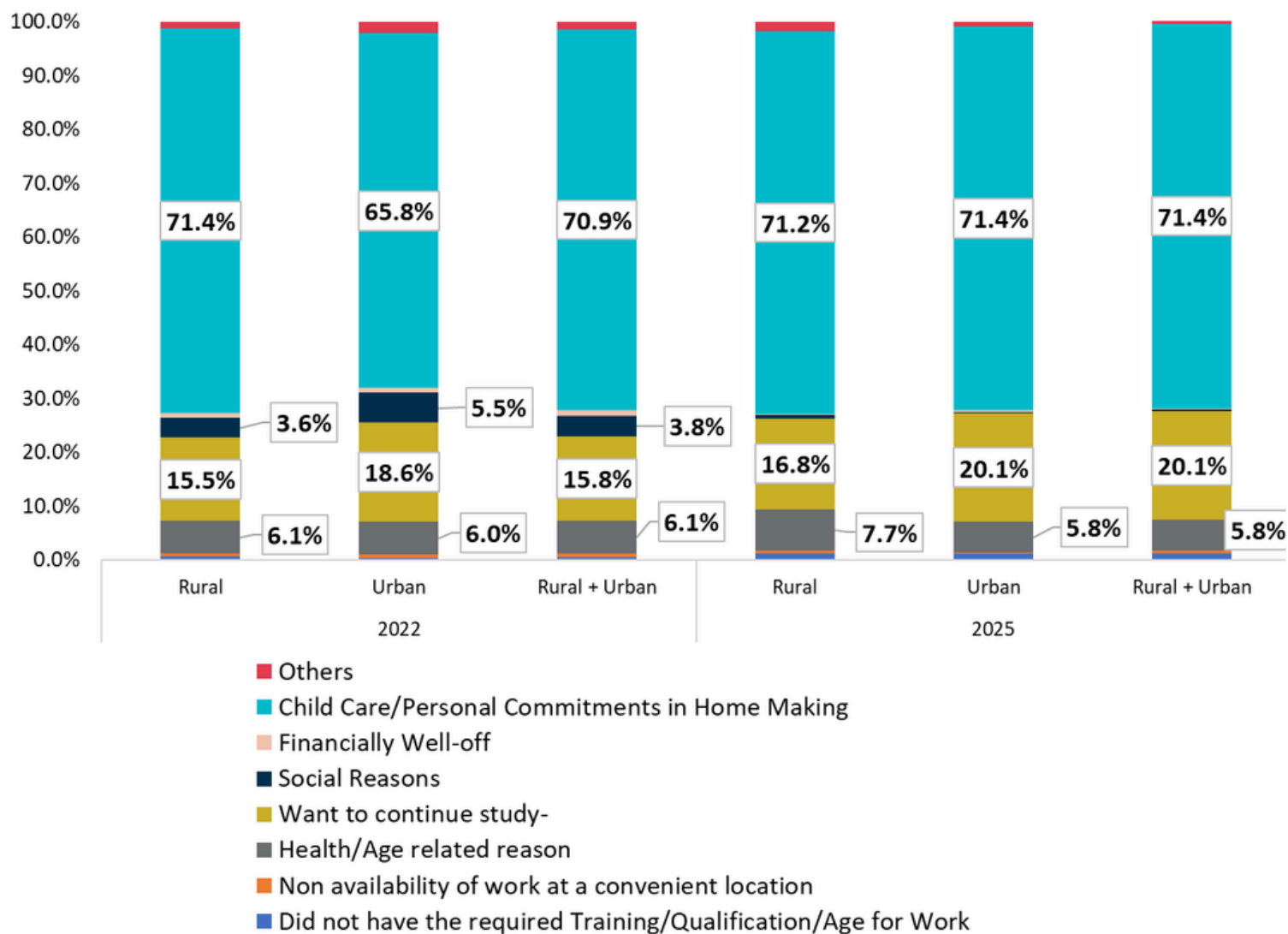
Figure 13: Extent and Composition of Social Security Coverage among Women in Regular Employment (2022–2025)



J: Reason for Not Being in the Labour Force

- Childcare and personal commitments related to home-making remained the overwhelmingly dominant reason for women being out of the labour force in Bihar, accounting for over 70% of responses in both rural and urban areas in 2025. Continuing education was the second most important reason, increasing from 15.8% in 2022 to 20.1% in 2025.
- Health- and age-related reasons also became slightly more important, particularly in rural areas. In contrast, social reasons, financial well-being, and lack of work opportunities accounted for only a small share of responses by 2025. Overall, unpaid care and domestic responsibilities continued to be the primary constraint on women's labour force participation in Bihar.

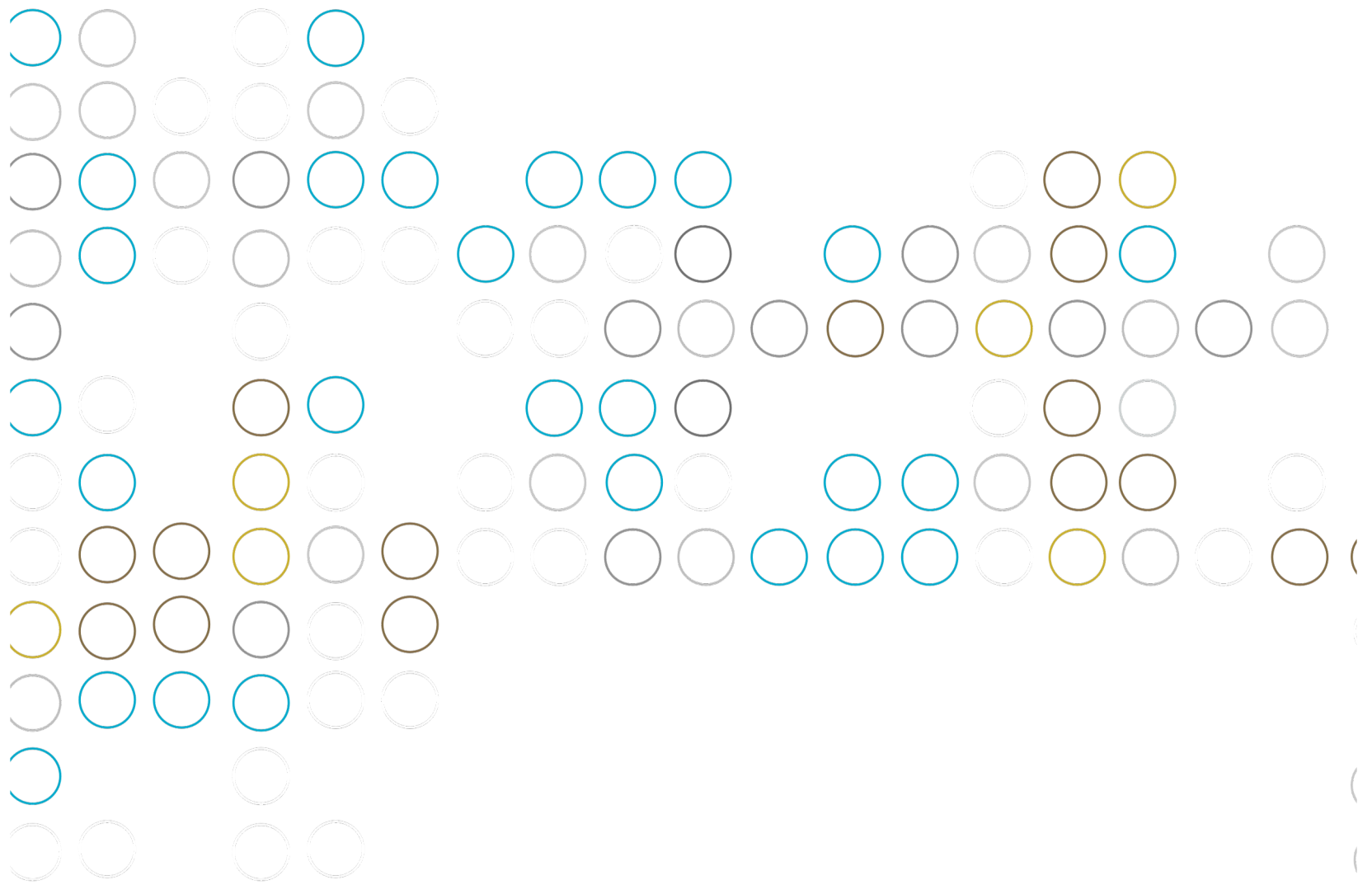
Figure 14: Reason for Not Being in The Labourforce



CONCLUSION

Overall, the analysis of labour market indicators for Bihar reveals an improvement in women's labour force participation and work participation between 2022 and 2025, but with continued concentration in agriculture, self-employment, and other informal forms of work. These trends are closely aligned with Bihar's evolving policy ecosystem, particularly the expansion of the JEEViKA SHG platform and the rollout of the Mukhyamantri Mahila Rojgar Yojana (2025), which have strengthened women's access to credit, enterprise support, and livelihood diversification, especially in agriculture, livestock, and small-scale self-employment. At the same time, long-standing interventions such as Kanya Utthan Yojana have contributed to improving educational attainment, which may be reflected in the gradual increase in women's participation in non-farm sectors like education and services.

Across both rural and urban areas, self-employment remains the dominant form of employment for women, with increasing reliance on own-account work and agriculture-related livelihoods. Within agriculture, there are signs of diversification towards animal husbandry and mixed farming, but agriculture continues to account for the largest share of women's employment. Urban women display relatively greater sectoral diversity, with employment concentrated in agriculture, retail trade, education, health services, and domestic work, although access to regular salaried employment remains limited. Employment quality also remains a concern, with a substantial proportion of women lacking written contracts and social security coverage. Most importantly, childcare and domestic responsibilities continue to be the primary reason for women remaining outside the labour force, highlighting the persistent influence of unpaid care work on women's economic participation.



This factsheet has been prepared by Vidhi and reviewed by Bidisha Mondal.

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