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TREND IN FEMALE LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION IN WEST BENGAL



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. From January 2025, the PLFS adopted a revised sampling design and methodology to improve the representativeness of labour market estimates. The analysis presented here uses calendar-year estimates, which remain broadly comparable across years, though caution may be warranted when comparing with estimates derived under the previous survey design.

Introduction

West Bengal, located in eastern India, is one of the most densely populated states with a diverse economic ranging from agriculture, manufacturing (jute, textiles, chemicals), trade, services, forest and fisheries, and construction sector. The state has a significant agrarian economy, especially in rural districts, while Kolkata serves as a major commercial and industrial hub.

Over the past decade, the state's economic growth has been modest. According to the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), West Bengal's Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) grew at an average annual rate of 4.3% between 2012-13 and 2021-22, and the state's share in India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) fell from 6.8% in 1990-91 to 5.8% in 2021-22. The structure of the economy has also shifted. Between 2013-14 and 2022-23, agriculture's share of GSDP declined by 5.2 percentage points, while the shares of manufacturing and services rose by 2.4 and 3.9 percentage points respectively.[1,2] In light of this scenario the women's labour force participation in West Bengal presents a distinctive pattern. Participation rate have been traditionally low, with a strong but declining presence in agriculture, and notable concentrations in textiles, tobacco manufacturing, and domestic services.

This factsheet analyses patterns of female labour force participation in West Bengal from 2022 to 2025 using PLFS calendar year data. It highlights trends in participation rates, sectoral distribution, occupational composition, employment types, and barriers to women's workforce entry.

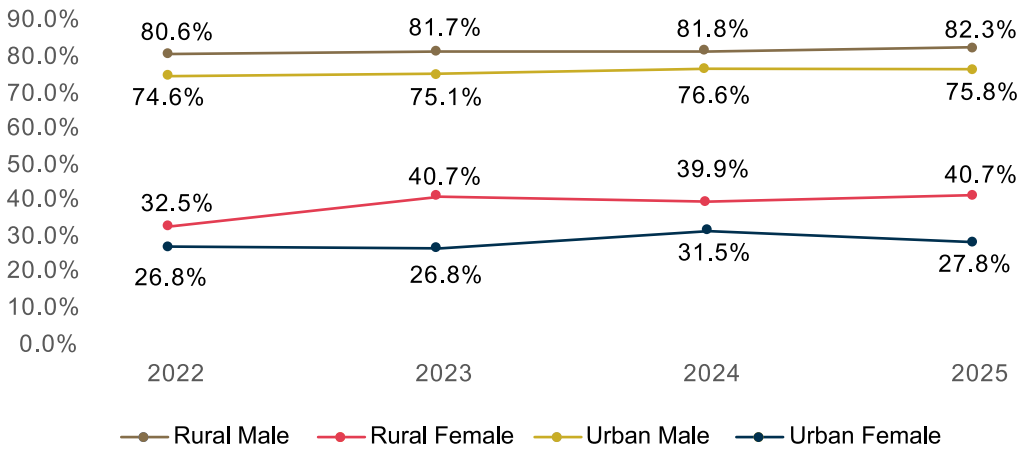
Trends in Female Workforce and Labour Force Participation Rates

The Worker Population Ratio (WPR) and Female Labour Force Participation Rate (FLFPR) for women in West Bengal remain below the national average, reflecting persistent structural barriers to women's employment in the state. Male WPR remains relatively high and stable, increasing slightly in rural areas (80.6% to 82.3%) and staying around 74.6% to 75.8% in urban areas.

[1] MOSPI, as of March 2024

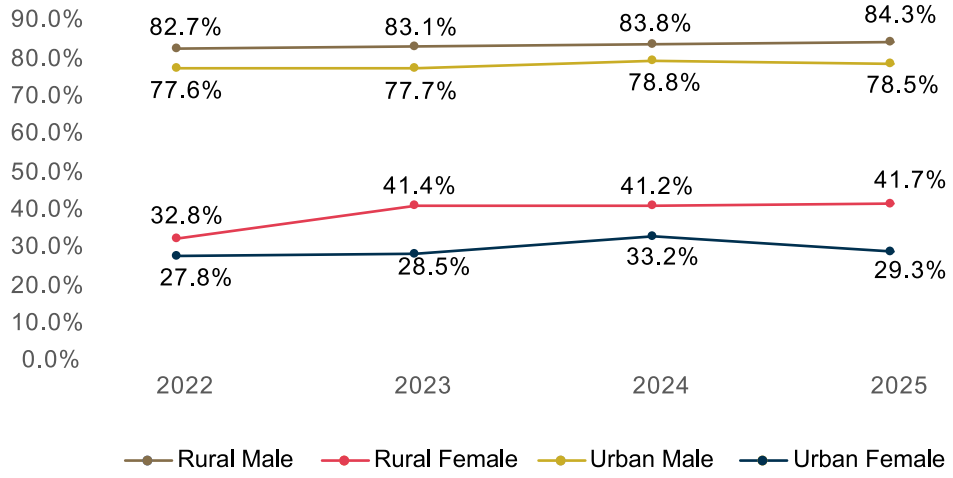
[2] Macro and Fiscal Landscape of the State of West Bengal, 2025. https://www.niti.gov.in/sites/default/files/2025-07/Macro-and-Fiscal-Landscape-of-the-State-of-West-Bengal-1.pdf

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



- The rural female WPR increase from 32.5% in 2022 to 40.7% in 2025, remaining steady around 40% through 2023 to 2025 broadly following the national trend. The urban female WPR shows fluctuation, rising from 26.8% in 2022 to 31.5% in 2024 before declining to 27.8% in 2025.

Figure 2: **Trends in FLPR (15 years and above)**



- The rural female LFPR improved from 32.8% (2022) to 41.7% (2025), remaining below the national average and following a similar trend. The rural male LFPR remain high, above national average and increases steadily from 82.7% in 2022 to 84.3% in 2025 consistent with the national trend.
- The urban female LFPR increased from 27.8% in 2022 to 33.2% in 2024 before declining to 29.3% in 2025. While the urban male LFPR remain consistently high and continued to rise, ranging from 77.6% in 2022 to 78.5% in 2025, in line with the national trend.
- These trends underscoring a persistent and wide gender gap as well as a rural urban disparity in workforce participation in West Bengal, as reflected in both the WPR and the LFPR.

Composition of Female Workforce

- Self-employment accounts for the majority of the rural female employment in West Bengal, though with some fluctuation. The share increasing from 68.0% in 2022 to 74% in 2023 declining to 71.7% in 2025, remaining comparable to the national rural average of 70.7% in 2025, suggesting that West Bengal mirrors the national pattern of self-employment dominance among rural women. Urban female employment also shows fluctuation across employment categories. The share of self-employment stood at 45.3% in 2022, increasing to 54.2% in 2024 further dropping to 46.8% in 2025.
- The share of casual labour in rural areas declined from 21.5% in 2022 to 15.7% in 2023 before recovering to 18.3% in 2025, indicating a marginal shift This remains notably higher than the national rural casual labour share of 13.5% in 2025, indicating that a relatively larger proportion of rural women in West Bengal continue to depend on informal wage-based work compared to the national average. The share of urban casual labour remains low and stable around 3.6% to 4.5% during 2023 to 2025.
- The share of regular salaried employment among rural women remain stable but limited, ranging between 10.5% in 2022, 10% in 2025. This is below the national rural average of 15.8% in 2025, indicating limited access to formal employment opportunities. The share of regular salaried worker among urban women also showed fluctuations with 49.7% in 2022 declining to 40.1% in 2024 and recovering to 48.6% in 2025. This broadly mirror the national urban regular salaried average of 51.2% in 2025, with West Bengal remaining marginally below.

Figure 3: **Type of Employment**

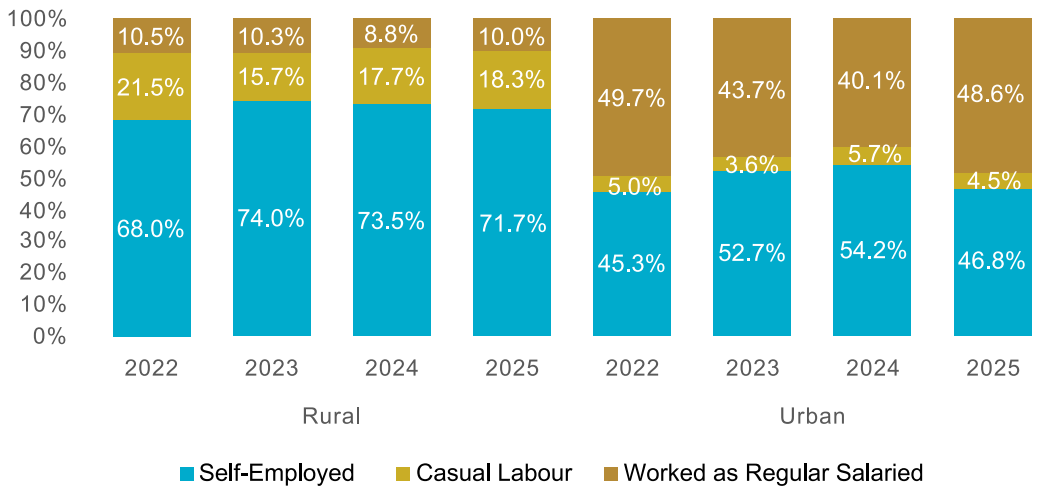
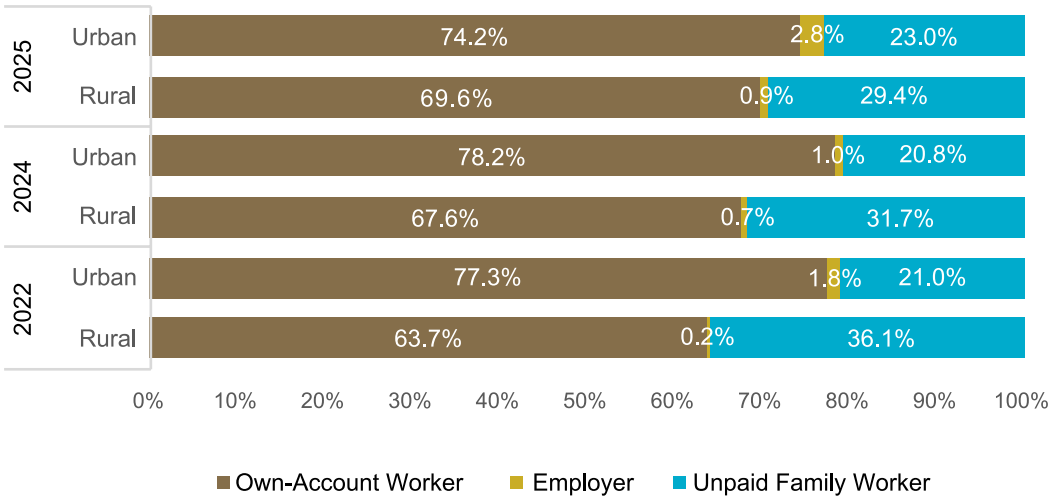


Figure 4: **Distribution among Self-Employed Women**



- Among self-employed rural women, the share engaged in own-account work increased consistently from 63.7% (2022) to 69.6% (2025). This aligns with the national trend, with West Bengal remaining slightly above the national figure. Among urban self-employed women, own-account work remains dominant with a marginal decline from 77.3% in 2022, to 74.2% in 2025, remaining above the national average.
- Unpaid family worker among rural women declined from 36.1% in 2022 to 29.4% in 2025, mirroring the declining share of unpaid family work. In urban areas, the share of women in unpaid family worker rose modestly from 21% to 23% over the same period.
- The share of women working as employers remains negligible in rural areas, staying below 1% throughout the period, similar to the national pattern. In urban areas, it increased from 1.8% in 2022 to 2.8% in 2025, though it remained below the national average of 3.1%.

Distribution of Women Workers by Broad Industry Divisions

- Rural female employment in West Bengal is dominated by agriculture (crop and animal production), consistent with the national pattern. Its share rose from approximately 58% in 2022 to 60% in 2025, remaining marginally below the national rural female share of 62.6%. Manufacture of tobacco products is the next largest source of employment, although its share declined marginally from 10% in 2022 to 9.4% in 2025. Education and retail trade follow, with the share of female workers in each falling from around 5% in 2022 to roughly 3% in 2025. This decline is consistent with the national pattern, although sectoral shares are smaller in rural West Bengal.

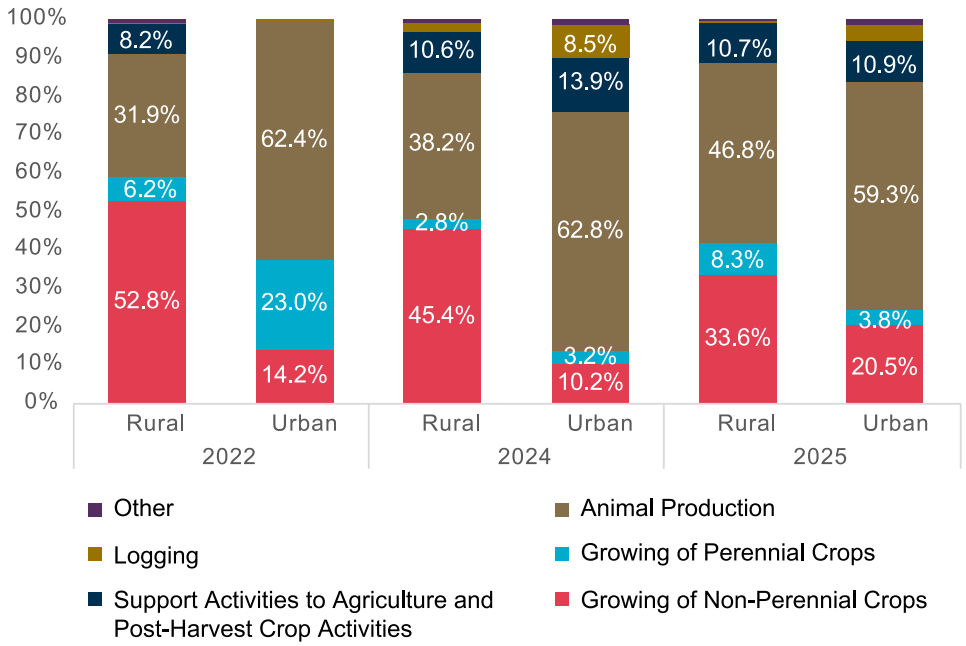
Table 1: **Distribution of Women Workers by Broad Industry Divisions**				
	Rural		**Urban**	
Broad Industry (NIC 2)	2022	2025	2022	2025
Crop and Animal Production, Hunting and Related Service Activities	58.0%	60.0%	6.0%	6.0%
Manufacture of Tobacco Products	10.0%	9.4%	9.0%	7.0%
Education	5.0%	3.3%	11.0%	11.1%
Retail Trade, Except of Motor Vehicles and Motorcycles	5.0%	2.5%	7.0%	10.0%
Activities of Households as Employers of Domestic Personnel	4.0%	2.1%	23.0%	22.7%
Manufacture of Textiles	3.0%	3.7%	6.0%	5.0%
Manufacture of Wearing Apparel	3.0%	2.5%	8.0%	8.0%
Other Manufacturing	2.0%	2.5%		-
Manufacture of Wood and of Products of Wood and Cork, Except Furniture; Manufacture of Articles of Straw and Plaiting Materials	2.0%	-	-	-
Human Health Activities	-	1.2%	-	3.8%
Food and Beverage Service Activities	-	1.5%	3.0%	4.0%
Computer Programming, Consultancy and Related Services	-	-	3.0%	-
Other Personal Service Activities	-	-	2.0%	-
Manufacture of Leather and Related Products	-	-	2.0%	-
Manufacture of Other Non-Metallic Mineral Products	-	3.9%	-	-
Undifferentiated Goods-Producing Activities of Private Households for Own Use	-	-	-	4.1%
Others	8.0%	7.0%	15.0%	18.0%

- In urban West Bengal, domestic work (activities of households as employers of domestic personnel) is the leading sector, with a stable share of around 23% between 2022 and 2025, significantly higher than the national urban average. Education remains the second largest sector, accounting for around 11% of urban female employment over the same period, broadly consistent with the national urban trend. The share of retail trade increased from 7% in 2022 to 10% in 2025, in line with the national trend of rising female participation in retail. The share of urban women employed in the manufacture of tobacco products declined from 9% in 2022 to 7% in 2025.

Distribution of Women Workers within Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing

- Among rural women employed in agriculture in West Bengal, the share working in growing of non-perennial crops declined sharply from 52.8% in 2022 to 45.4% in 2024 to 33.6% in 2025. Over the same period, the share in animal production rose from 31.9% to 46.8%, indicating a gradual shift towards livestock-based activities. This is broadly consistent with the national trend, although the pace of change appears sharper in West Bengal. The share in support activities to agriculture and post-harvest crop activities increased from 8.2% in 2022 to 10.6% in 2024, with no change in 2025. The share of women growing perennial crops fell from 6.2% in 2022 to 2.8% in 2024 before recovering to 8.3% in 2025.

Figure 5: **Distribution of Women Workers within Agriculture And Allied Activities**



- Among urban women employed in agriculture in West Bengal, the share working in growing of non-perennial crops declined from 14.2% in 2022 to 10.2% in 2024 before rising to 20.5% in 2025. The share in growing of perennial crops fell sharply from 23.0% in 2022 to 3.8% in 2025. Animal production declined modestly from 62.4% to 59.3% over the same period. The share in support activities to agriculture and post-harvest crop activities rose from 0% in 2022 to 13.9% in 2024, before falling to 10.9% in 2025.
- The sub-sectors of plant propagation, silviculture and other forestry activities, logging, gathering of non-wood forest products, fishing and aquaculture have negligible representation across all three years, reflecting the limited integration of rural and urban women into these value chains, consistent with the national trend.

Distribution of Self-Employed Women Workers by Industry

- Among self-employed rural women in West Bengal, agriculture dominates the distribution, with its share rising from 56.2% in 2022 to 63% in 2025, though it remains significantly below the national rural average. Manufacture of tobacco products is the second largest sector, with its share declining marginally from 14.5% in 2022 to 13.2% in 2025, and it remains significantly above the national average. The share of retail trade fell by about half, from 6.6% in 2022 to 3.2% in 2025, dropping below the national average by 2025.

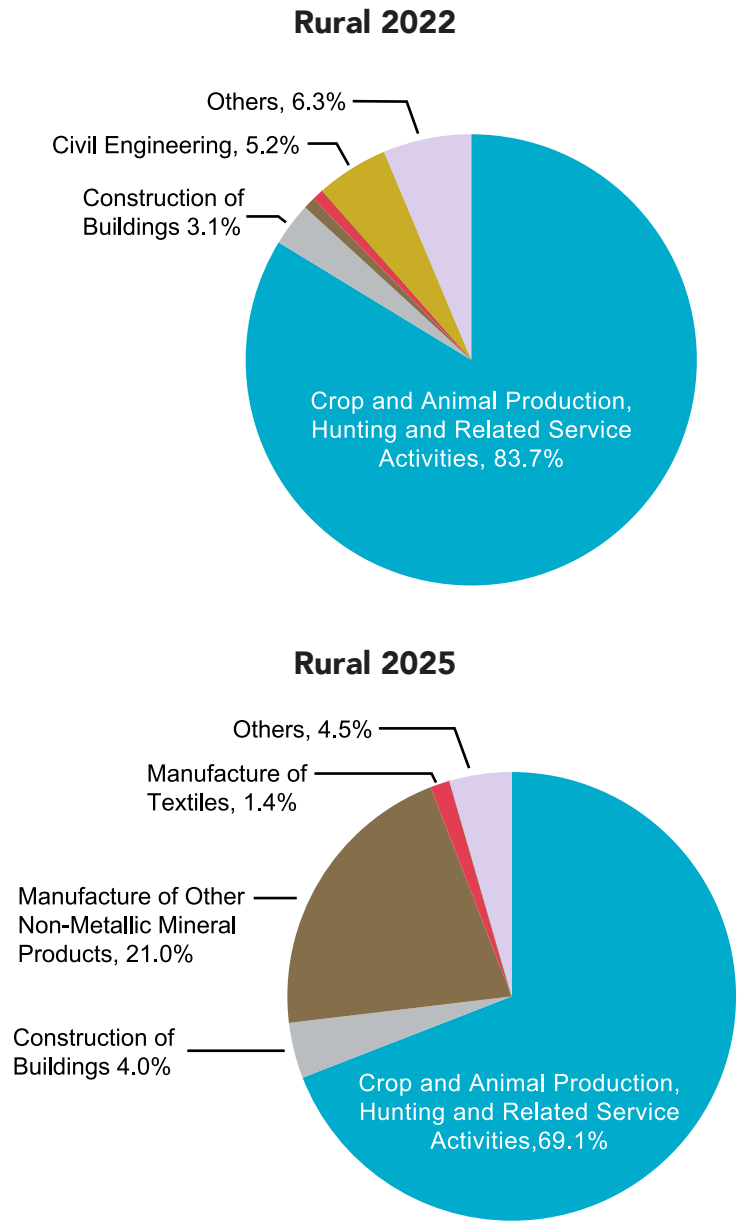
Table 2: ***Distribution of Self-Employed Women by Broad Industry Types***

	Rural		Urban	
NIC (2-Digit)	2022	2025	2022	2025
Crop And Animal Production, Hunting and Related Service Activities	56.2%	63.0%	10.2%	10.1%
Retail Trade, Except of Motor Vehicles and Motorcycles	6.6%	3.2%	11.9%	16.4%
Manufacture of Wearing Apparel	3.0%	3.2%	16.4%	13.8%
Education	3.4%	2.5%	8.3%	9.1%
Food and Beverage Service Activities	1.5%	1.9%	5.5%	7.5%
Manufacture of Wood and of Products of Wood and Cork, Except Furniture; Manufacture of Articles of Straw and Plaiting Materials	2.4%			0.0%
Manufacture of Tobacco Products	14.5%	13.2%	19.2%	14.3%
Manufacture of Textiles	4.8%	4.7%	11.0%	9.0%
Manufacture of Leather and Related Products			2.5%	0.0%
Manufacture of Paper and Paper Products			2.8%	
Manufacture of Food Products		0.8%	0.0%	2.4%
Other Personal Service Activities		0.0%	2.6%	6.0%
Other Manufacturing		3.3%		2.6%
Others	7.6%	4.3%	9.7%	8.7%

- Among self-employed urban women in West Bengal, retail trade (excluding motor vehicles and motorcycles) remains the leading sector, with its share rising from 11.9% in 2022 to 16.4% in 2025, though it remains below the national level. The share of tobacco manufacturing declined from 19.2% to 14.3%, falling in line with the national pattern but remaining well above the national share, which declined from 5.7% to 3.9%. Wearing apparel manufacturing also declined from 16.4% to 13.8%, remaining one of the prominent sectors for urban female self-employment, consistent with the national trend. The share of education increased slowly from 8.3% in 2022 to 9.1% in 2025, remaining significantly above the national average. The share of crop and animal production remained stable at around 10% throughout the period.

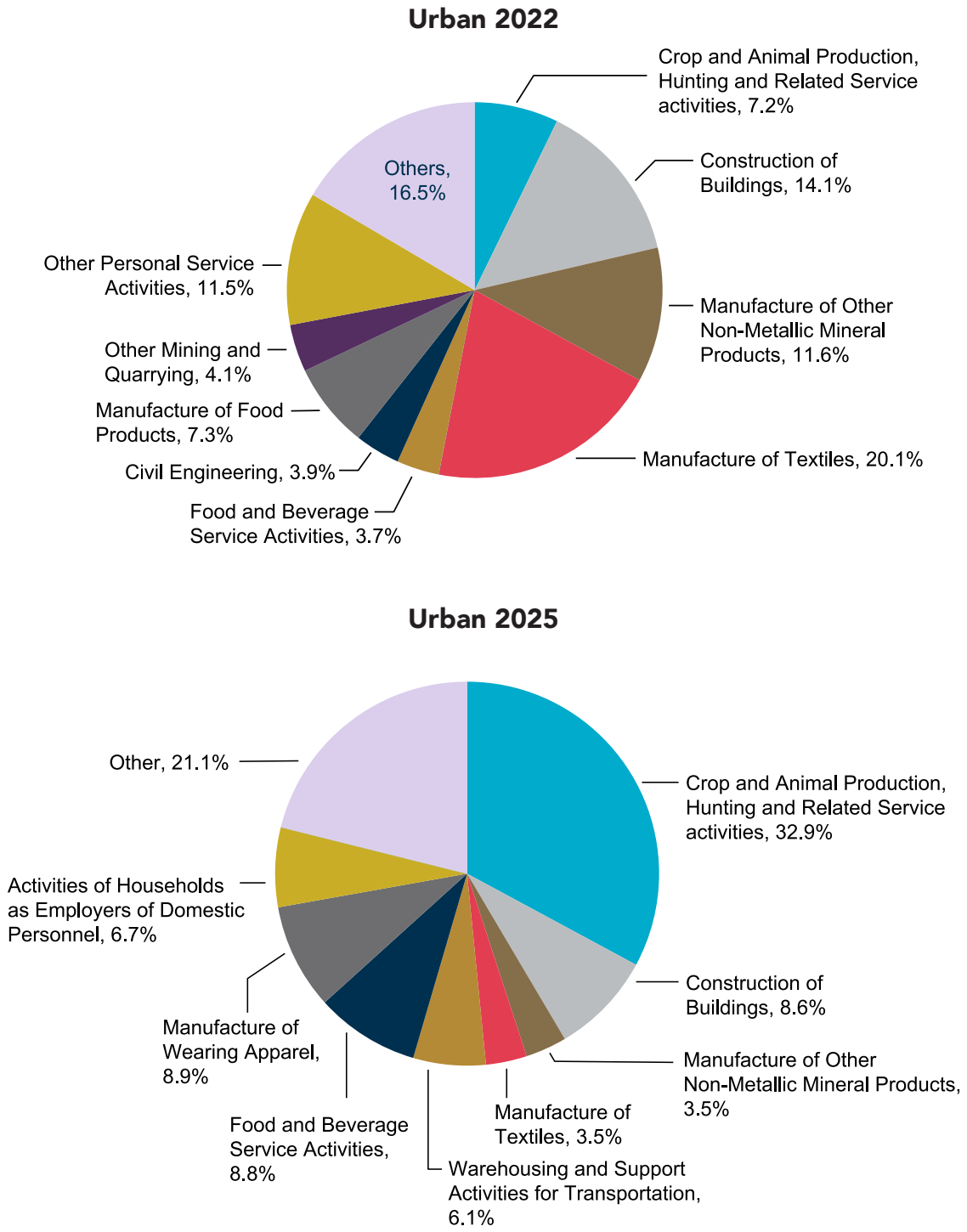
Distribution of Casual Women Workers by Broad Industry Types

Figure 6A: **Distribution of Casual Women Workers by Broad Industry Types**



- Rural casual women workers in West Bengal remain primarily concentrated in agriculture, with the share declining from 83.7% share in 2022, to 69.1% by 2025. Despite this decline, the share remains close national rural average of 70.1% in 2025. The significant decline in agriculture is accompanied by a sharp rise in manufacture of other non-metallic mineral and other mining and quarrying increasing sharply from 0.8% in 2022 to 21% in 2025.
- Engagement of rural female casual worker in construction of buildings following the national trend increased from 3.1% in 2022 to 4.0% in 2025, remaining significantly below the national average.

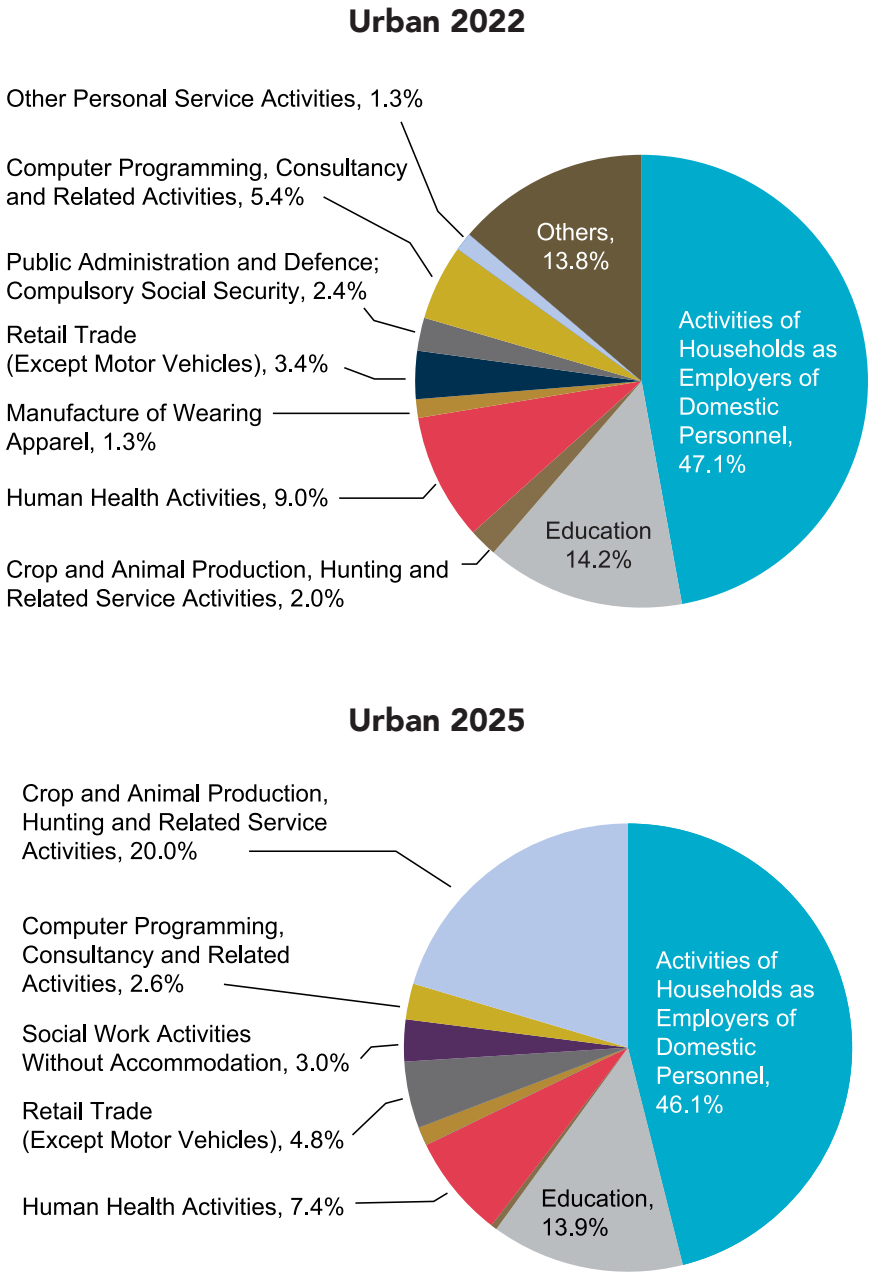
Figure 6B: **Distribution of Casual Women Workers by Broad Industry Types**



- Urban casual women workers in West Bengal show a marked shift in sectoral distribution between 2022 and 2025. The share engaged in crop and animal production increased from 7.2% to 32.9%, becoming the largest reported sector in 2025.
- The share employed in textile manufacturing declined sharply from 20.1% to 3.5%, while construction fell from 14.1% to 8.6% and the manufacture of other non-metallic mineral products from 11.6% to 3.5%.
- Food and beverage service activities increased from 3.7% to 8.8%. Warehousing, wearing apparel manufacturing and domestic personnel services also featured among the reported sectors in 2025, indicating a changing composition of urban casual employment.

Distribution of Regular Salaried Women Workers by Industry[3]

Figure 7: **Distribution of Urban Regular Salaried Women Workers by Broad Industry Types**



- In urban areas, activities of households as employers of domestic personnel leads the regular salaried employment among women with 47.1% in 2022, before marginally declining to 46.1% by 2025. The share of education in urban female salaried employment remain stable at 14% during the period 2022 to 2025, consistent with the national trend, with percentage share below national average.

[3] The 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.

- Engagement of urban women engaged in human health activities declined from 9.0% 2022 to 7.4% in 2025. Urban casual worker shares in the retail trade except motor vehicles increased from 3.4% to 4.8% from 2022 to 2025, remaining below the national average.

Distribution of Women Workers by Occupation Types

Table 3: ***Distribution of Women Worker by Occupation Types***

Occupation (NCO Division)	Rural		Urban	
	2022	2025	2022	2025
Legislators, Senior Officials and Managers	0.3%	0.2%	3.6%	1.8%
Professionals	4.8%	3.6%	15.9%	16.4%
Technicians and Associate Professionals	1.1%	1.9%	4.1%	4.6%
Clerical Support Workers	0.1%	0.3%	3.2%	3.9%
Service and Sales Workers	7.6%	5.9%	25.2%	29.4%
Skilled Agricultural, Forestry and Fishery Workers	38.8%	45.9%	4.6%	5.0%
Craft and Related Trades Workers	20.0%	19.7%	25.8%	20.6%
Plant and Machine Operators and Assemblers	1.3%	0.9%	1.9%	1.6%
Elementary Occupations	26.1%	21.6%	15.7%	16.7%

- In rural West Bengal, skilled agricultural and fishery workers form the largest occupational category, with their share rising from 38.8% in 2022 to 45.9% in 2025, though this remains below the national rural average of 58%. Elementary occupations are the second largest category, declining from 26.1% in 2022 to 21.6% in 2025. Craft and related trades workers, including those in jute weaving, textile work and tobacco processing, remained consistently around 20% over the same period. Professional occupations account for a small share of rural women's employment, declining from 4.8% in 2022 to 3.6% in 2025, while managerial roles accounted for less than 0.2% in 2025, similar to the national pattern.
- In urban West Bengal, women's occupational distribution is more diversified than in rural areas. Service workers and shop and market sales workers form the largest group, accounting for 29.4% of employment in 2025, followed by craft and related trades workers (20.6%) and professionals (16.4%), the latter broadly in line with the national urban average. The share of managers halved from 3.6% in 2022 to 1.8% in 2025, similar to the national trend.

Condition of Work in Regular Employment

Social security coverage for regularly employed women in West Bengal remains low. In urban areas, the share of women not eligible for any major benefit was 67.9% in 2022 and 69.0% in 2025, notably higher than the national urban average, where the share has declined more consistently over the period. On the contrary, the social security coverage has declined for rural women from 56.1% in 2022 and 47.7% in 2025.

Figure 8: **Social Security Benefits**

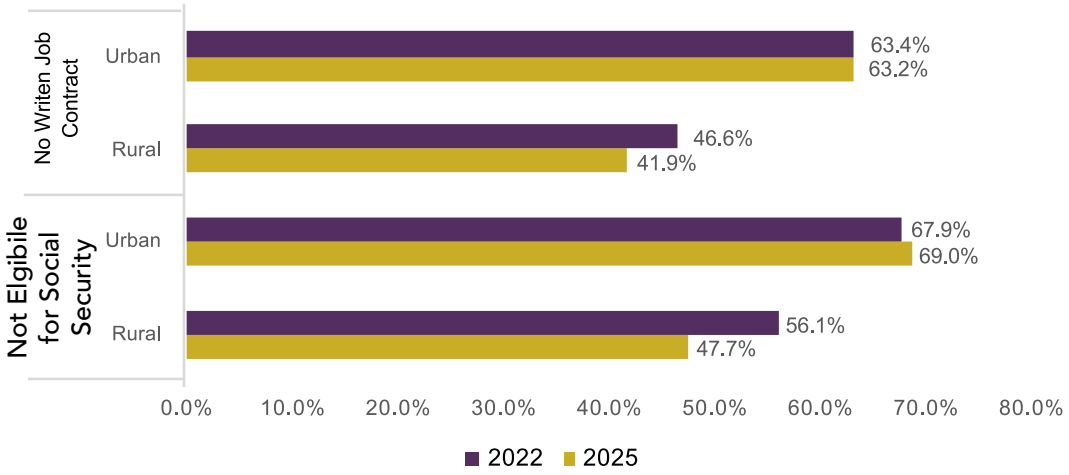
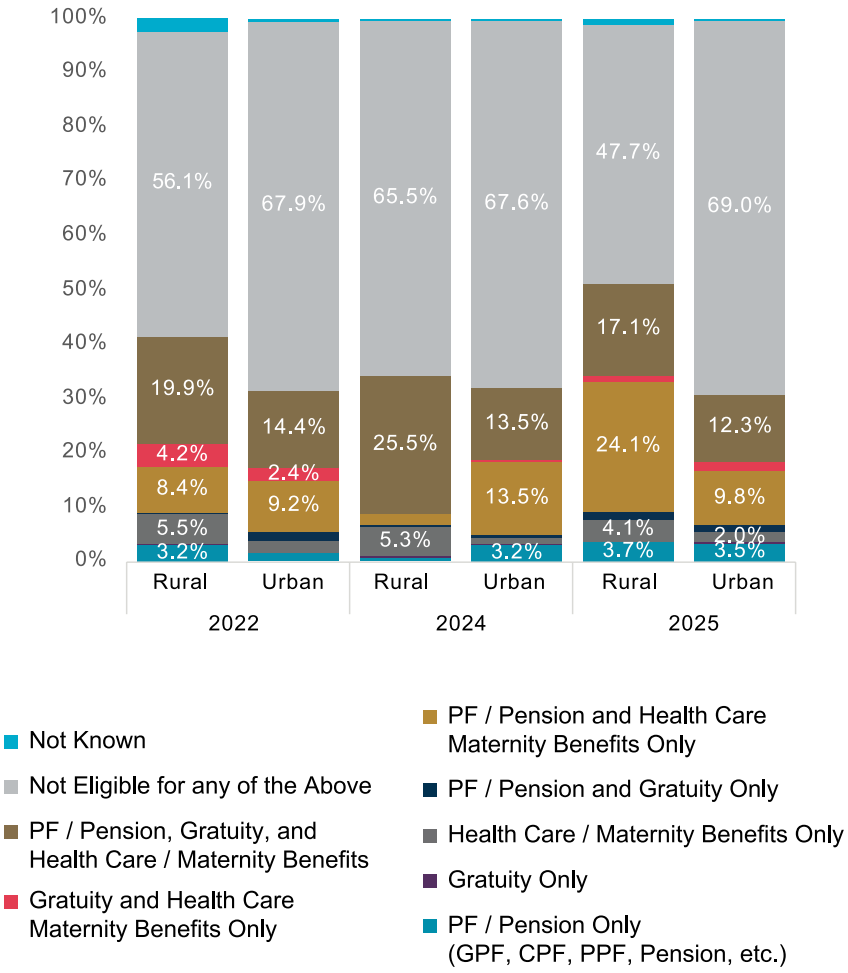


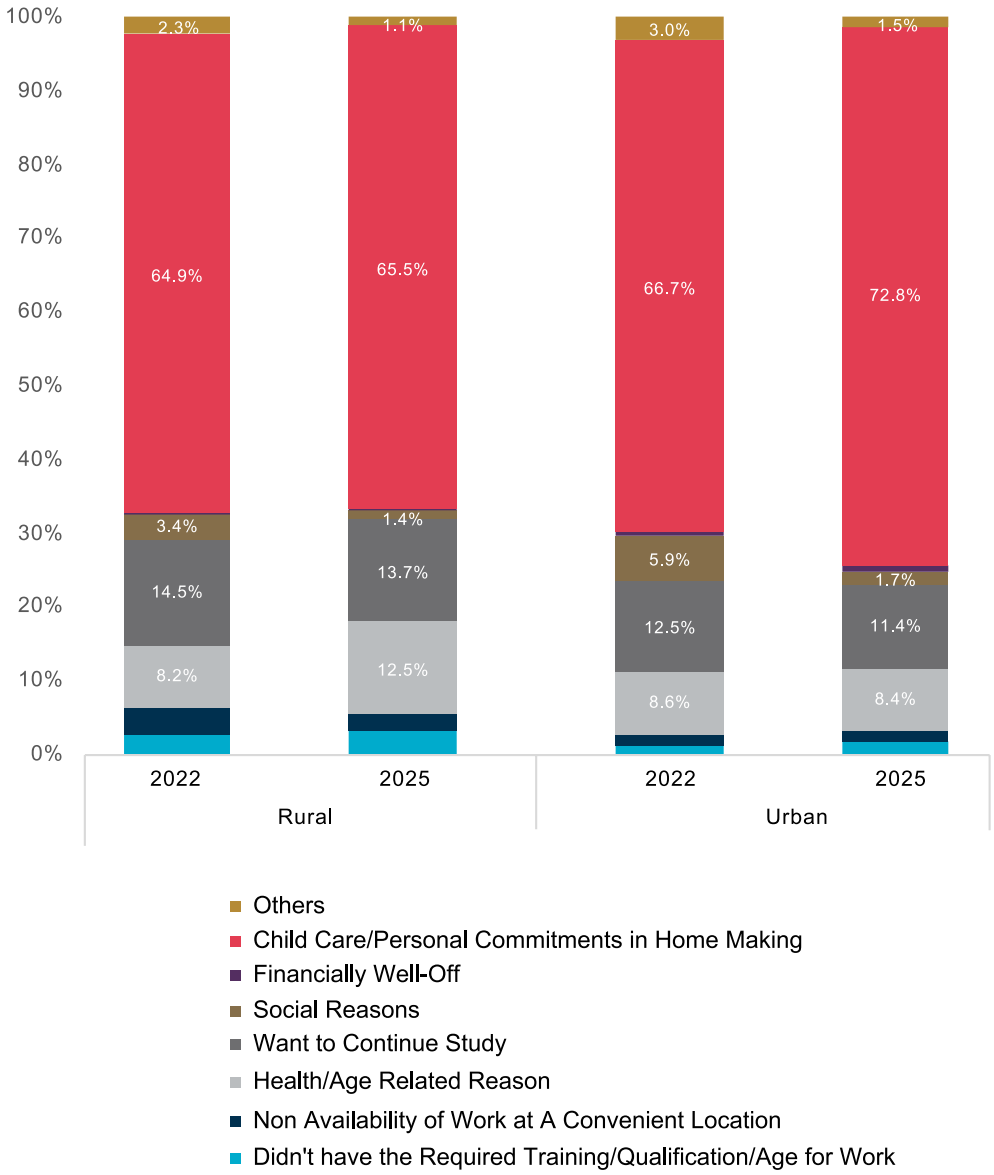
Figure 9: **Extent and Composition of Social Security Coverage among Women in Regular Employment (2022–2025)**



- In rural West Bengal, the share of regularly employed women not eligible for any major benefit declined from 56.1% in 2022 to 47.7% in 2025, broadly in line with the national rural trend. Access to comprehensive coverage (PF/pension, gratuity, and health and maternity benefits together) rose from 19.9% in 2022 to 25.5% in 2024 before falling to 17.1% in 2025. In urban areas, comprehensive coverage was lower, declining from 14.4% in 2022 to 12.3% in 2025. Among salaried women in rural West Bengal, the share without a written job contract declined from 46.6% in 2022 to 41.9% in 2025, in line with the national trend but well below the national average of 53.5% in 2025. In urban areas, the share remained stable at 63.3% over the same period, in contrast to the national trend.

Reasons for Not Being in the Labour Force

Figure 10: **Reason for Not Being in Labour Force**



- Among rural women in West Bengal, childcare and personal commitments related to home-making remain the primary reason for being out of the labour force, at around 65% throughout 2022 to 2025. Continuing education remains the second most important reason, at around 14% over the same period. The share citing health or age-related reasons increased from 8.2% in 2022 to 12.8% in 2025.
- In urban areas, the share of women citing childcare and home-making as the primary reason increased from 66.7% in 2022 to 72.8% in 2025, in line with the national pattern. Continuing education declined from 12.5% in 2022 to 11.4% in 2025. The share citing social reasons fell from 5.9% in 2022 to 1.7% in 2025, while health and age-related reasons remained unchanged over the period.

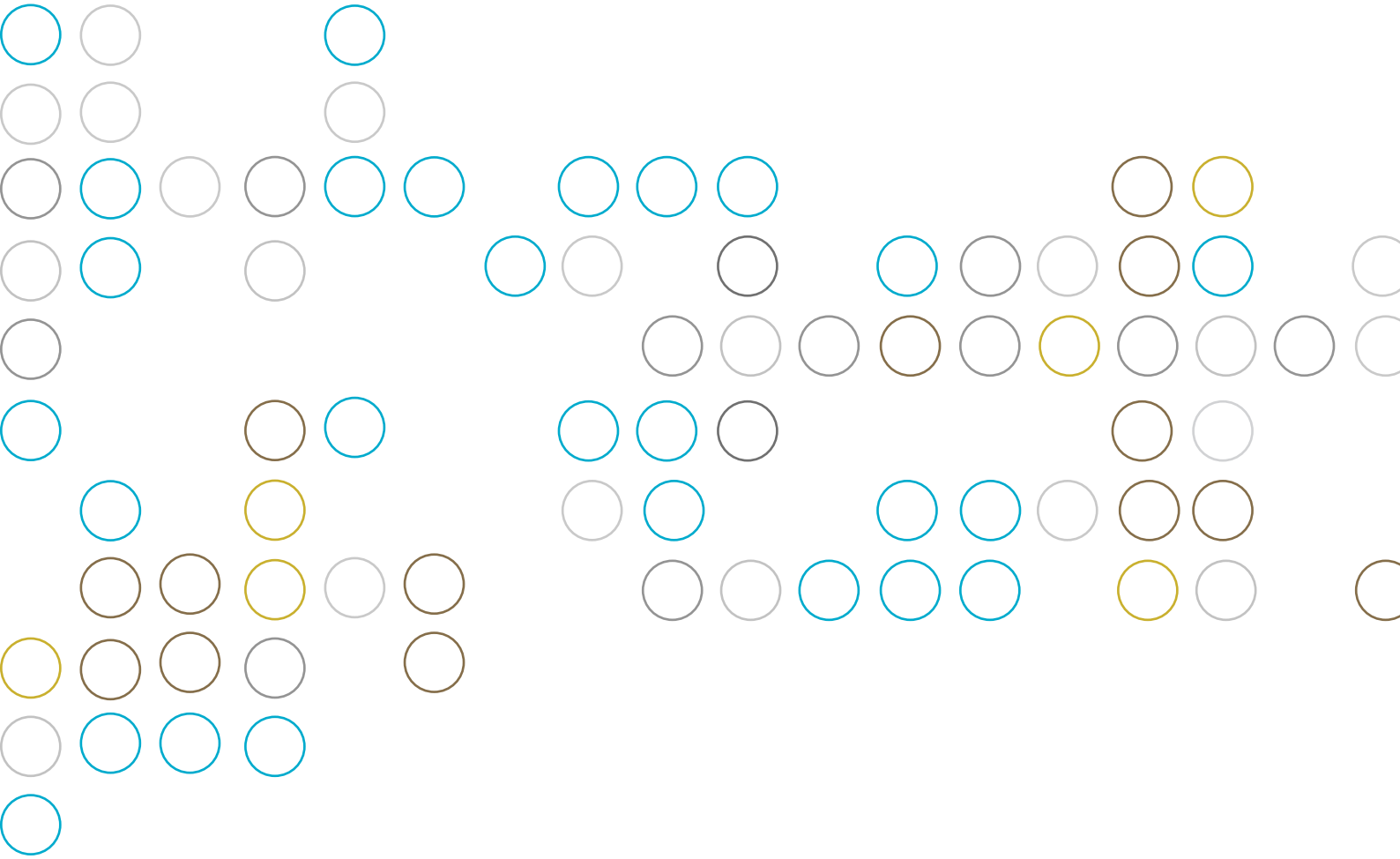
Conclusion

Women's labour market participation in West Bengal presents a mixed picture between 2022 and 2025, with distinct differences between rural and urban areas. Rural female workforce participation improved and remained relatively stable after 2023, while urban participation fluctuated and declined in 2025 following an increase in the preceding years. These trends highlight the importance of examining not only changes in participation rates but also the nature and quality of women's employment.

Employment remains concentrated in a limited set of sectors. Rural women are predominantly engaged in agriculture, alongside tobacco manufacturing, while domestic work is a major source of employment for urban women. Self-employment accounts for a substantial share of rural women's work, with a considerable proportion engaged in own-account activities or contributing as unpaid family workers. These patterns underscore the need to examine the security, earnings and working conditions associated with women's employment, rather than treating participation alone as an indicator of improved economic opportunities.

Employment security remains a concern, particularly in urban areas, where 69% of regularly employed women were not eligible for any of the major social-security benefits in 2025. At the same time, childcare and home-making responsibilities remain the most frequently reported reasons for women being outside the labour force, accounting for a large majority of responses in both rural and urban areas. The findings point to the importance of accessible childcare, stronger social protection and better-quality employment opportunities in enabling women's sustained participation in the workforce. These trends coincide with state schemes such as Lakshmir Bhandar4, a direct cash transfer to women launched in 2021, the West Bengal Karma Sathi Prakalpa Yojana5, providing low-interest loans for self-employment since 2020, and MGNREGS6 for rural employment guarantee, which may havetrends coincide with state schemes such as Lakshmir Bhandar, a direct cash transfer to women launched in 2021, the West Bengal Karma Sathi Prakalpa Yojana, providing low-interest loans for self-employment since 2020, and MGNREGS8 for rural employment guarantee, which may have supported women's access to income and livelihoods, although their impact is not assessed here.

[4] https://www.myscheme.gov.in/schemes/lbs-wb
[5] https://www.govtschemes.in/west-bengal-karma-sathi-prakalpa
[6] https://prd.wb.gov.in/schemes/detail/dccde0b0-17b8-448a-bf8c-66d888eda023



This factsheet has been prepared by Arpita Paul and reviewed by Bidisha Mondal.
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