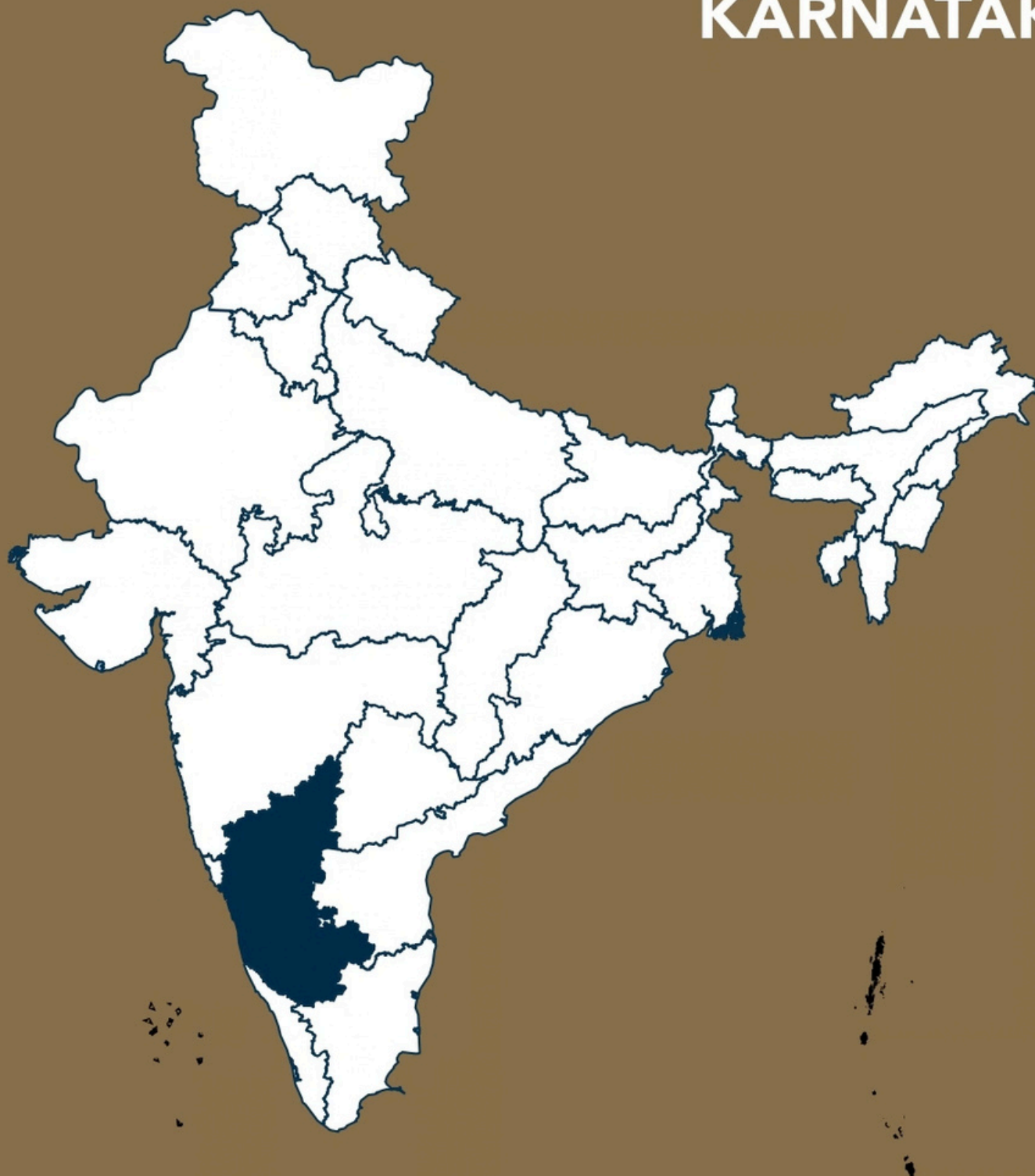


TRENDS IN FEMALE LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION

KARNATAKA



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

Karnataka occupies a distinctive position in India's economic landscape, driven by rapid growth in services, technology, and manufacturing sectors. As home to a large share of the country's information technology industry and Global Capability Centres (GCCs), the state has emerged as a key contributor to India's economic growth. Recent policy initiatives, including the Karnataka GCC Policy 2024- 2029¹, alongside welfare and mobility-focused schemes such as Shakti and Gruha Lakshmi, reflect the state's broader efforts to strengthen economic participation and inclusion.

Despite these advances, women's labour force participation in Karnataka continues to present important policy questions. While the state has witnessed improvements in female labour force participation in recent years, concerns remain around the nature and quality of women's employment, persistent gender gaps, and unequal access to opportunities across sectors and regions. Against this backdrop, this factsheet examines key trends in women's labour force participation in Karnataka using PLFS data, with a focus on employment composition, sectoral and occupational distribution, quality of work, and barriers to women's participation in the labour market.

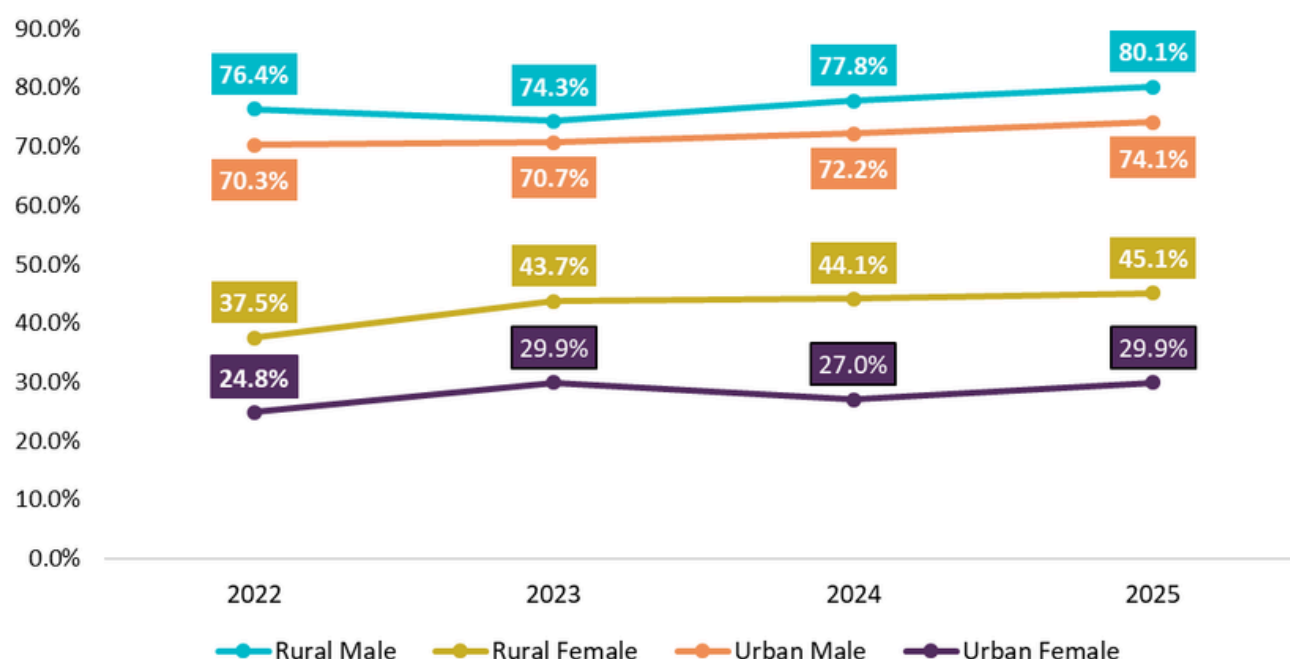


Trends in Female Workforce and Labour Force Participation Rates

- The worker population ratio (WPR) in Karnataka shows an overall increasing trend across both rural and urban areas. Rural male WPR rises from 76.4% in 2022 to 80.1% in 2025, while rural female WPR increases steadily from 37.5% to 45.1%, indicating improved female participation. In urban areas, male WPR also grows gradually (70.3% to 74.1%), while female WPR rises overall (24.8% to 29.9%) despite a dip in 2024. Overall, the data suggests strengthening workforce participation, particularly among women, though gender gaps remain more pronounced in urban areas.

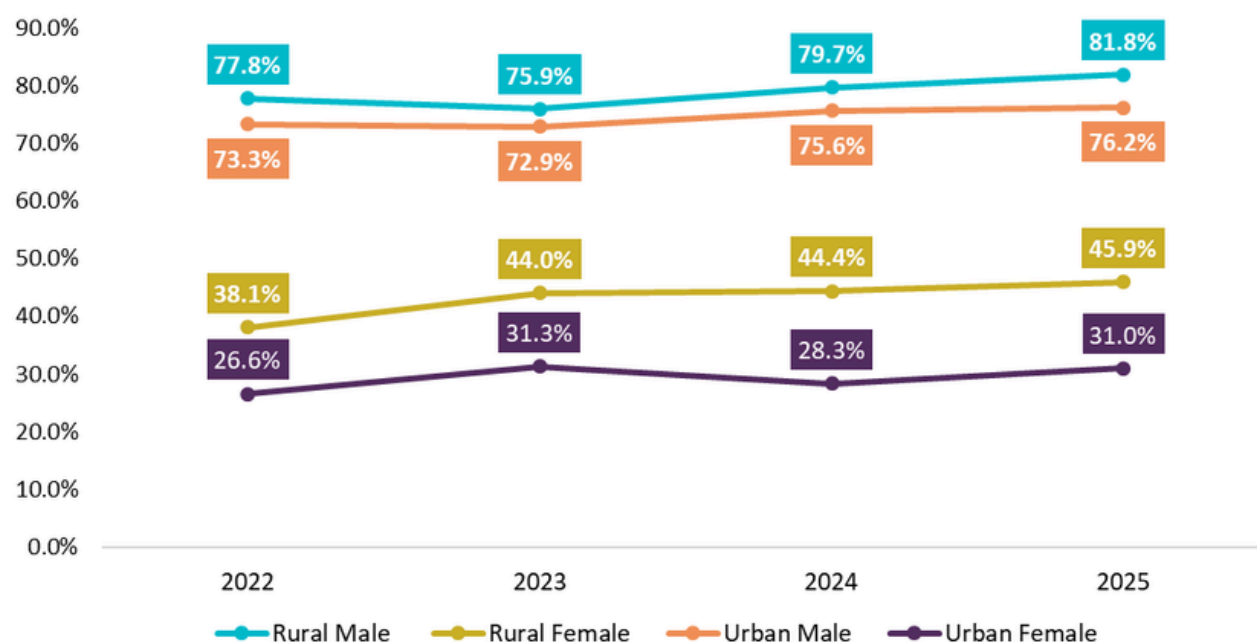
¹Department of Information Technology, Government of Karnataka. (n.d.). Karnataka Global Capability Centre (GCC) Policy 2024-2029. https://eitbt.karnataka.gov.in/it/public/uploads/media_to_upload1733219682.pdf

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



- Karnataka's FLFPR trends between 2022 and 2025 show a steady rise in women's labour force participation across both rural and urban areas, although significant gender gaps persist. Rural female participation increased from 38.1% in 2022 to 45.9% in 2025, indicating a strong and consistent improvement in women's engagement with the labour market. Urban female participation also rose overall from 26.6% to 31.0%, despite a dip in 2024, suggesting comparatively slower and more volatile growth in urban areas. In contrast, male participation rates remained consistently high across both rural and urban regions throughout the period. The data highlights that while women's participation is improving, particularly in rural Karnataka, the gap between male and female labour force participation continues to remain substantial.
- Compared to the all-India averages, Karnataka shows relatively better female labour force participation, especially in urban areas. While rural female FLFPR in Karnataka broadly follows the national trend, urban female participation remains consistently higher than the all-India average.

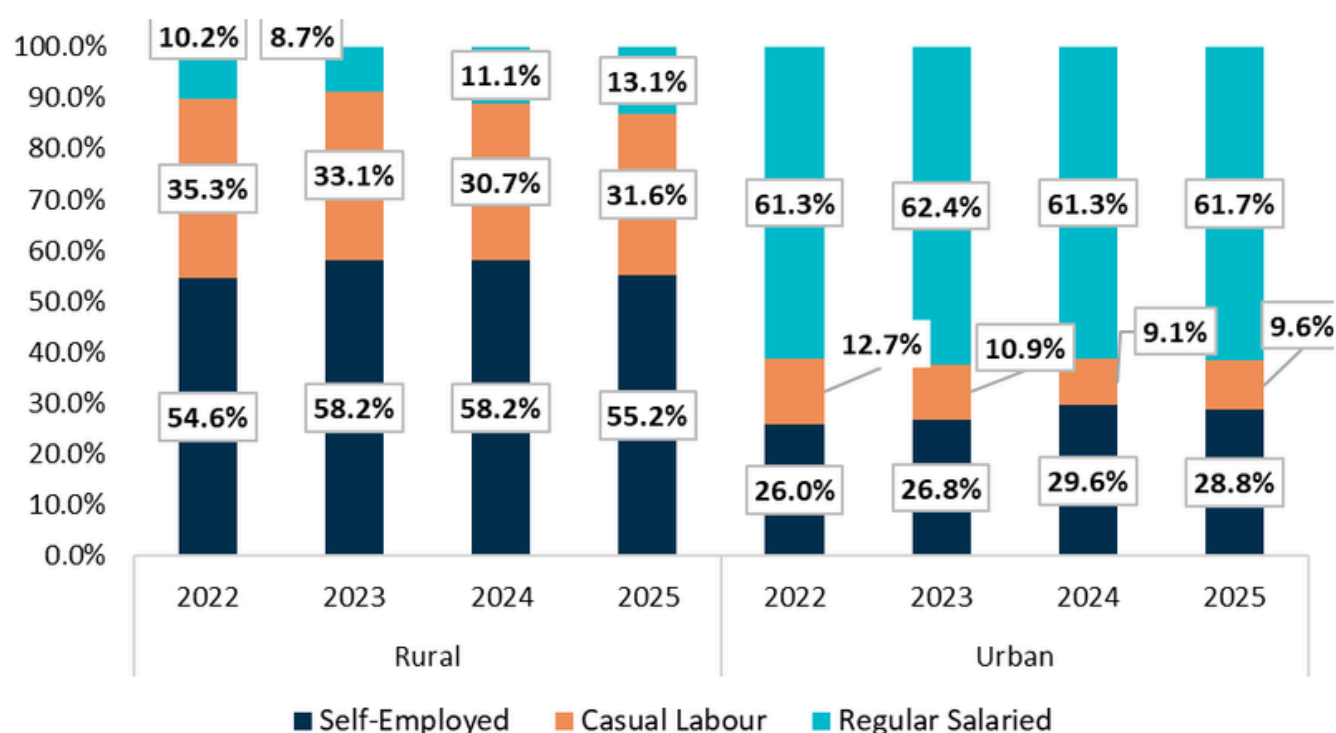
Figure 2: Trends in FLFPR (15 Years and Above)



A: Composition of Female Workforce

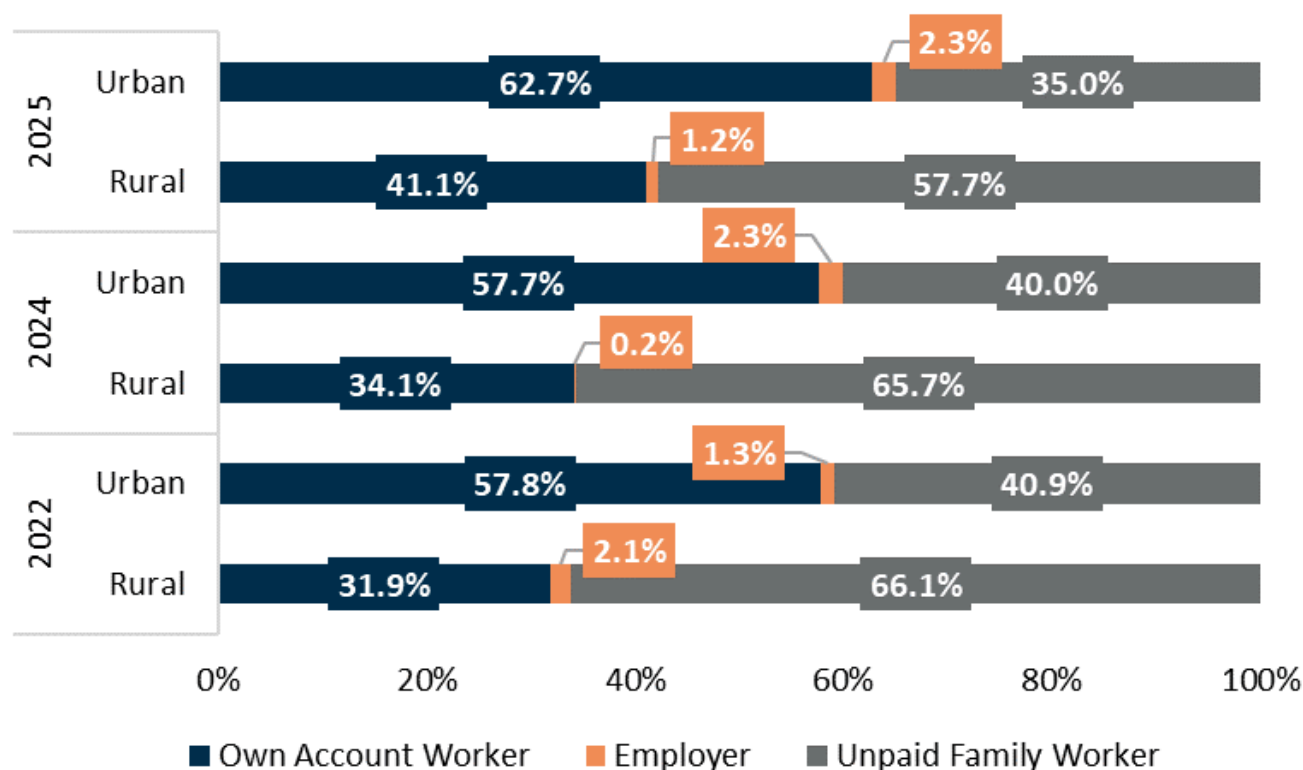
- Self-employment remains the dominant category of work for women in Karnataka, particularly in rural areas. The share of rural women in self-employment increased from 54.6% in 2022 to 58.2% in both 2023 and 2024, before slightly declining to 55.2% in 2025. Urban women also saw a gradual rise in self-employment, from 26.0% in 2022 to 28.8% in 2025.
- Casual labour participation among women declined across both rural and urban areas over the period. In rural Karnataka, the share fell from 35.3% in 2022 to 31.6% in 2025, while in urban areas it declined from 12.7% to 9.6%.
- Regular salaried employment showed an increasing trend, especially in rural areas. The share of rural women in regular salaried work rose from 10.2% in 2022 to 13.1% in 2025, indicating some improvement in access to stable employment opportunities. In urban Karnataka, regular salaried work consistently remained the largest category of employment for women, staying around 61-62% throughout the period.
- Compared to the all-India averages, Karnataka shows **relatively lower dependence on self-employment and stronger participation of women in regular salaried work**, particularly in urban areas. While self-employment remains the dominant category for rural women in the state and nationally, Karnataka's shares are consistently lower than the national average. At the same time, urban women in Karnataka have a much higher presence in regular salaried employment compared to all-India levels, **indicating relatively better access to formal and stable jobs**. Casual labour participation has declined over time in both Karnataka and India, although rural Karnataka continues to report slightly higher shares than the national average.

Figure 3: Type of Employment



- Among self-employed women in Karnataka, own-account work shows a rising trend across both rural and urban areas. The share of rural women working as own-account workers increased from 31.9% in 2022 to 41.1% in 2025, while the urban share rose from 57.8% to 62.7%. This suggests growing independent economic participation among women, especially in urban areas.
- The proportion of women working as employers remained extremely low (2.1% in 2022 to 1.2% in 2025 in rural areas and 1.3% in 2022 to 2.3% in 2025 in urban areas) throughout the period in both rural and urban Karnataka, indicating limited women-led enterprise ownership and job creation.
- Unpaid family work continues to account for a significant share of women's self-employment, particularly in rural areas, though it declined over time. Rural unpaid family workers decreased from 66.1% in 2022 to 57.7% in 2025, while the urban share declined from 40.9% to 35.0%. This points towards a gradual shift of women from unpaid family labour to more independent forms of work.
- Compared to the all-India averages, **self-employed women in Karnataka show a relatively lower dependence on unpaid family work** and a **stronger presence in own-account work**, particularly in urban areas. While unpaid family work remains significant in rural Karnataka, its share is consistently lower than the national average and declines more sharply over time. At the same time, Karnataka records higher shares of women working as own-account workers, indicating relatively greater independent economic participation.

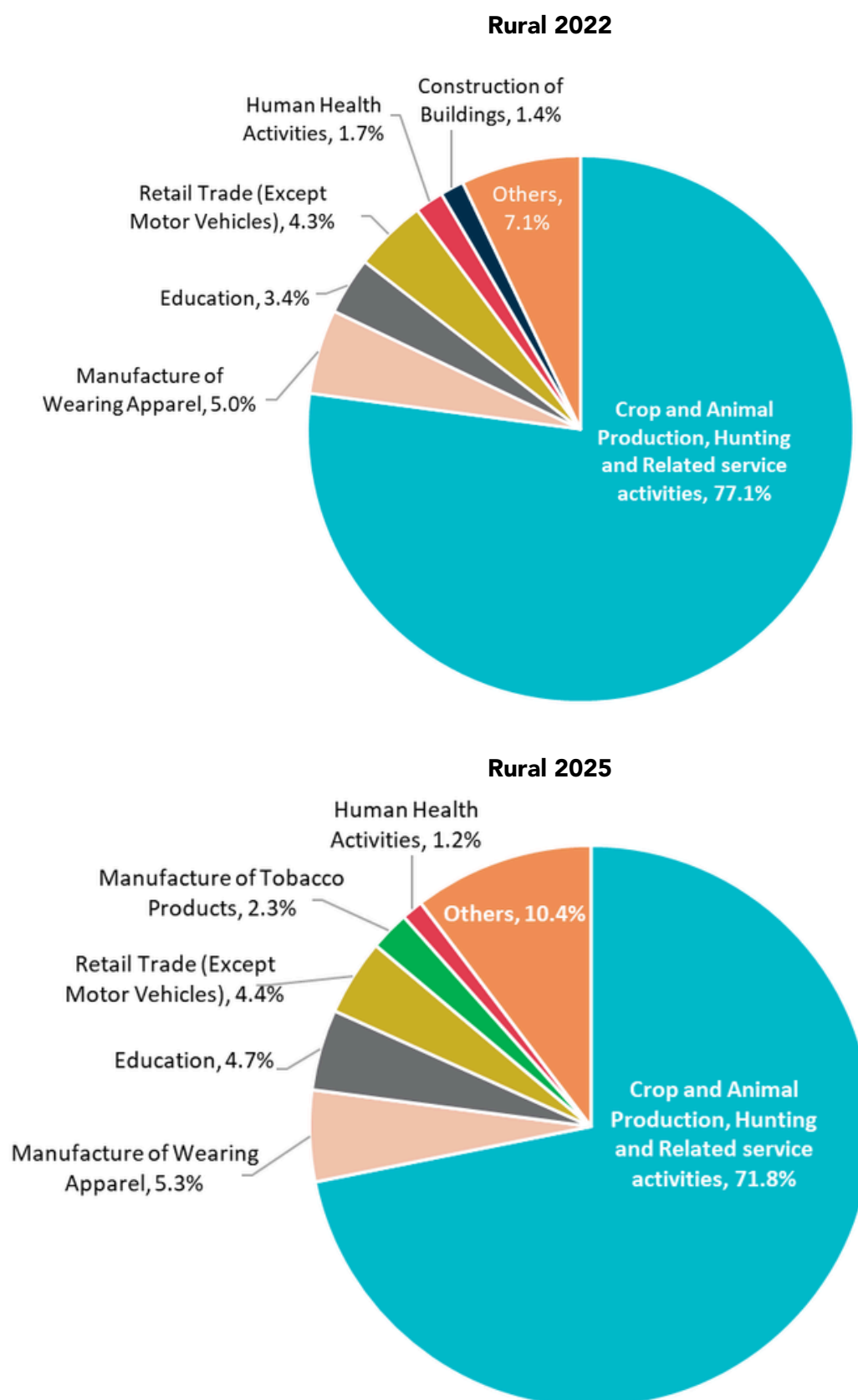
Figure 4: Distribution among Self-Employed Women



B: Distribution of Women Workers by Broad Industry Divisions

- In rural Karnataka, women continue to be heavily concentrated in agriculture-related activities, although the share declined from 77.1% in 2022 to 71.8% in 2025. At the same time, employment in sectors such as wearing apparel manufacturing, education, and tobacco products saw a slight increase, indicating gradual diversification beyond agriculture. And, retail trade remained relatively stable across the two years.

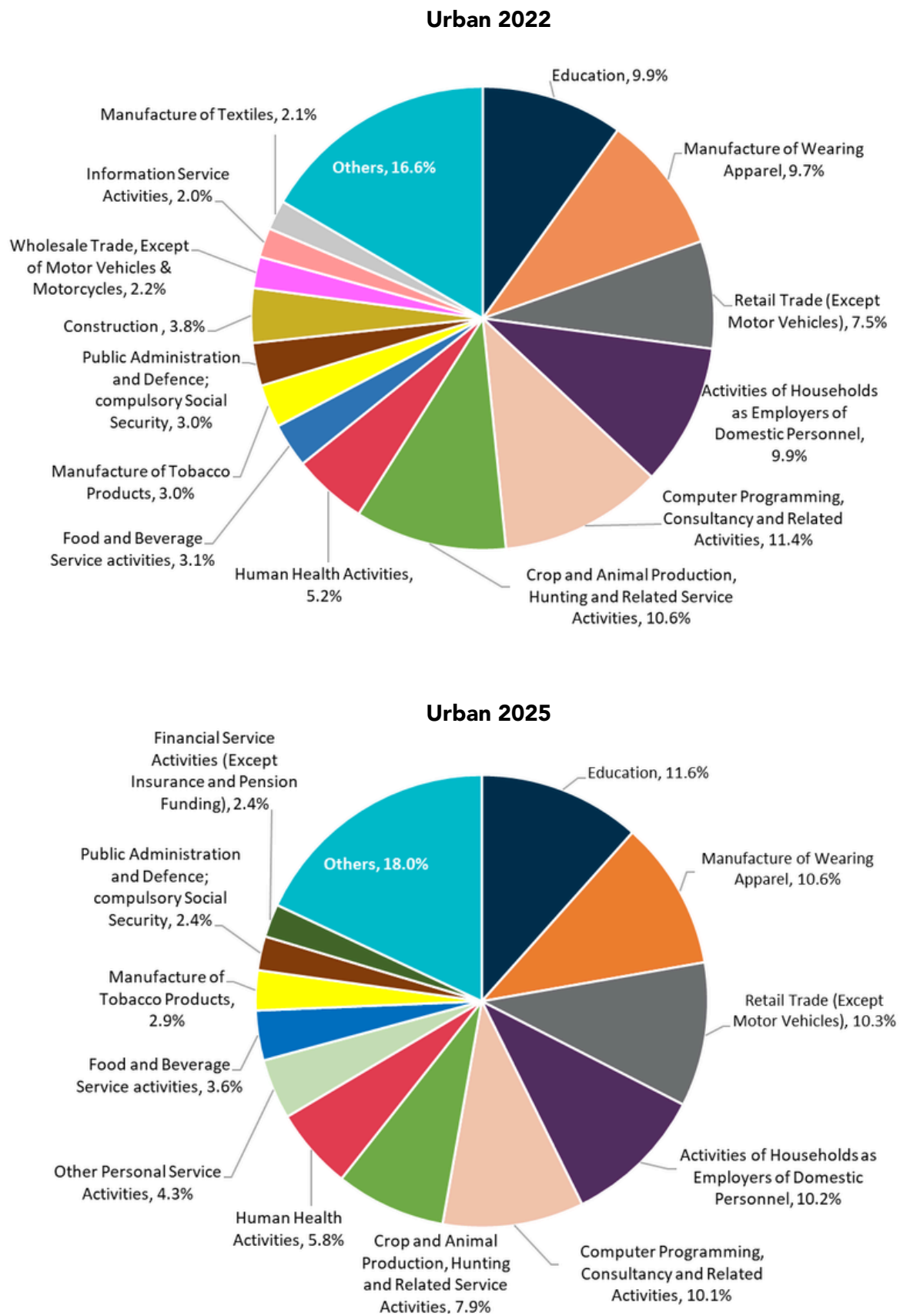
Figure 5A: Distribution of Women Workers by Broad Industry Divisions (Rural)



- Urban women workers in Karnataka are concentrated across education, apparel manufacturing, retail trade, and domestic work. Between 2022 and 2025, the shares in education (9.9% to 11.6%), apparel manufacturing (9.7% to 10.6%), and retail trade (7.5% to 10.3%) increased, while domestic work remained stable (9.9% to 10.2%). Agriculture declined

from 10.6% to 7.9%, while health activities rose from 5.2% to 5.8%. Overall, the data indicates a shift towards education, retail, apparel manufacturing and other service-sector activities, alongside a decline in the agriculture and some skilled service activities.

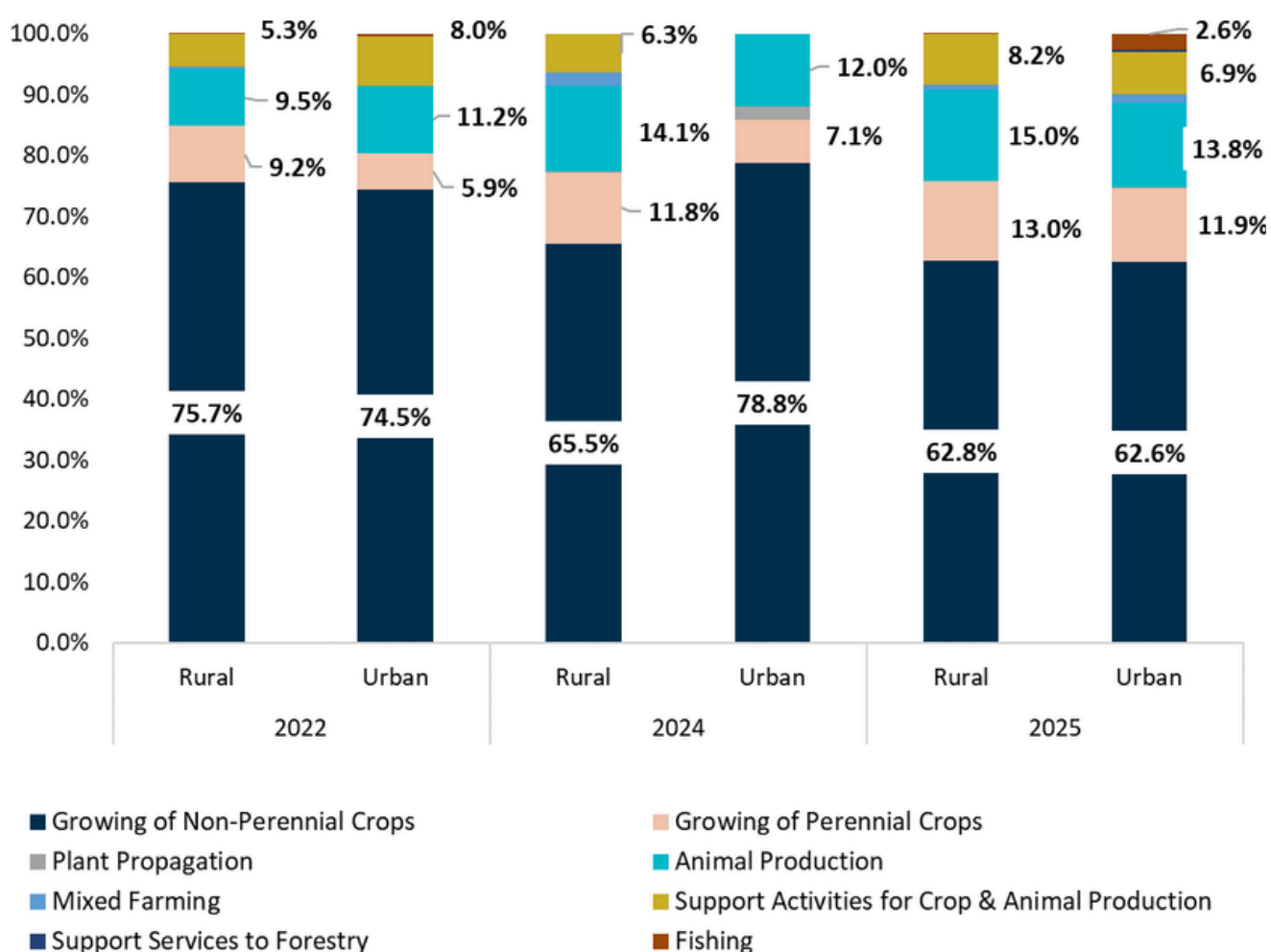
Figure 5B: Distribution of Women Workers by Broad Industry Divisions (Urban)



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

- Among rural women engaged in agriculture-based work, growing of non-perennial crops remains the dominant activity, although its share declined significantly from 75.7% in 2022 to 62.8% in 2025. At the same time, women's participation in animal production increased from 9.5% to 15.0%, perennial crops from 9.2% to 13.0%, and support activities for crop and animal production from 5.3% to 8.2%. This indicates a gradual diversification of rural women's agricultural roles beyond traditional crop cultivation.
- Urban women in agriculture-related occupations were also primarily concentrated in non-perennial crops, though the share declined from 74.5% in 2022 to 62.6% in 2025. Simultaneously, participation in perennial crops rose from 5.9% to 11.9%, animal production from 11.2% to 13.8%, and fishing from 0.4% to 2.6% by 2025. These trends suggest increasing diversification of urban women's engagement across different agri-based activities.

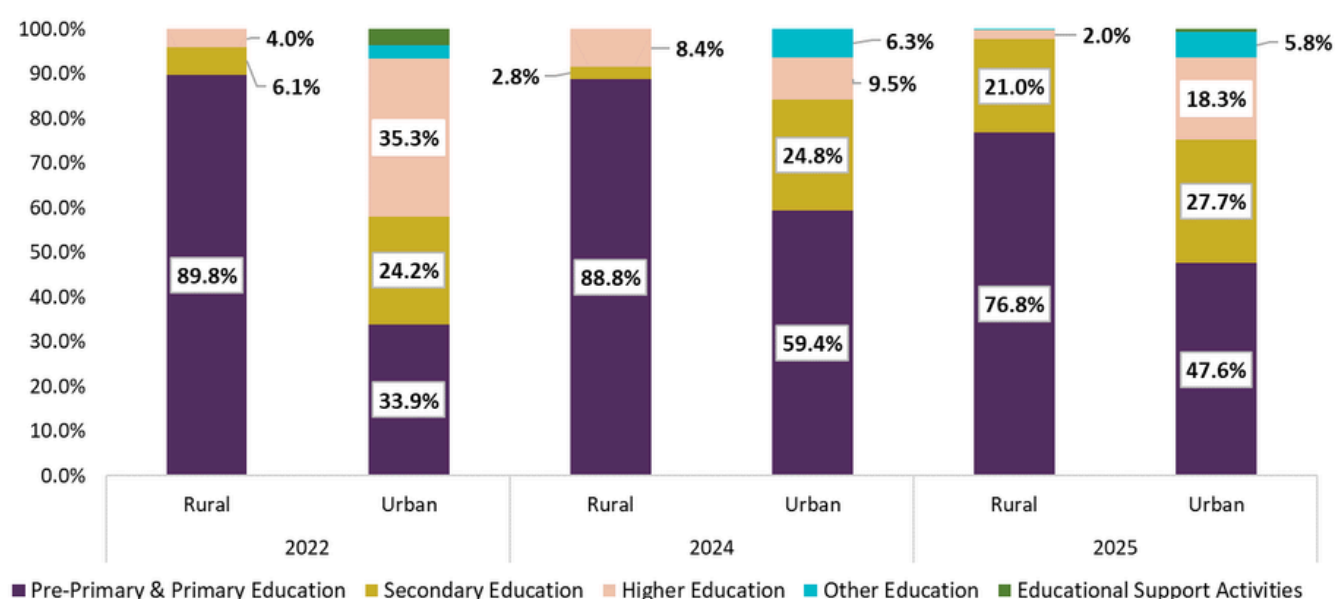
Figure 6: Distribution of Women Workers within Agriculture and Allied Activities



D: Distribution of women workers within Education

- Rural women employed in the education sector are overwhelmingly concentrated in pre-primary and primary education, although the share declined from 89.8% in 2022 to 76.8% in 2025. At the same time, participation in secondary education increased significantly from 6.1% to 21.0%, indicating gradual transition to higher-skill and higher-paid opportunities within educational roles.
- Urban women in education-related occupations are distributed more diversely across levels of education. While pre-primary and primary education accounted for the largest share in 2025 (47.6%), women also had substantial representation in secondary education (27.7%) and higher education (18.3%). Compared to rural areas, urban women show greater engagement in higher and secondary education roles, reflecting better-paid occupational opportunities within the education sector.

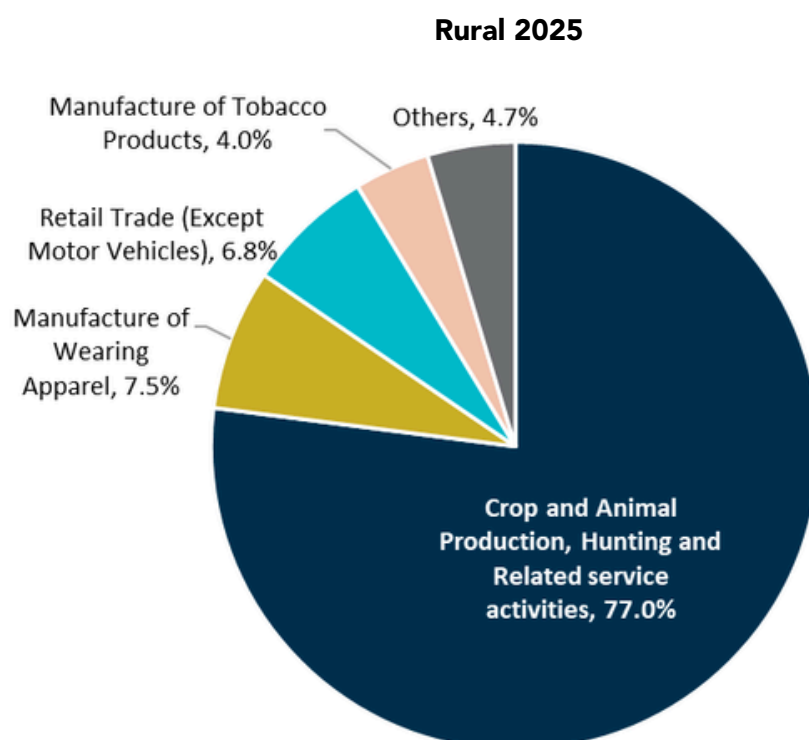
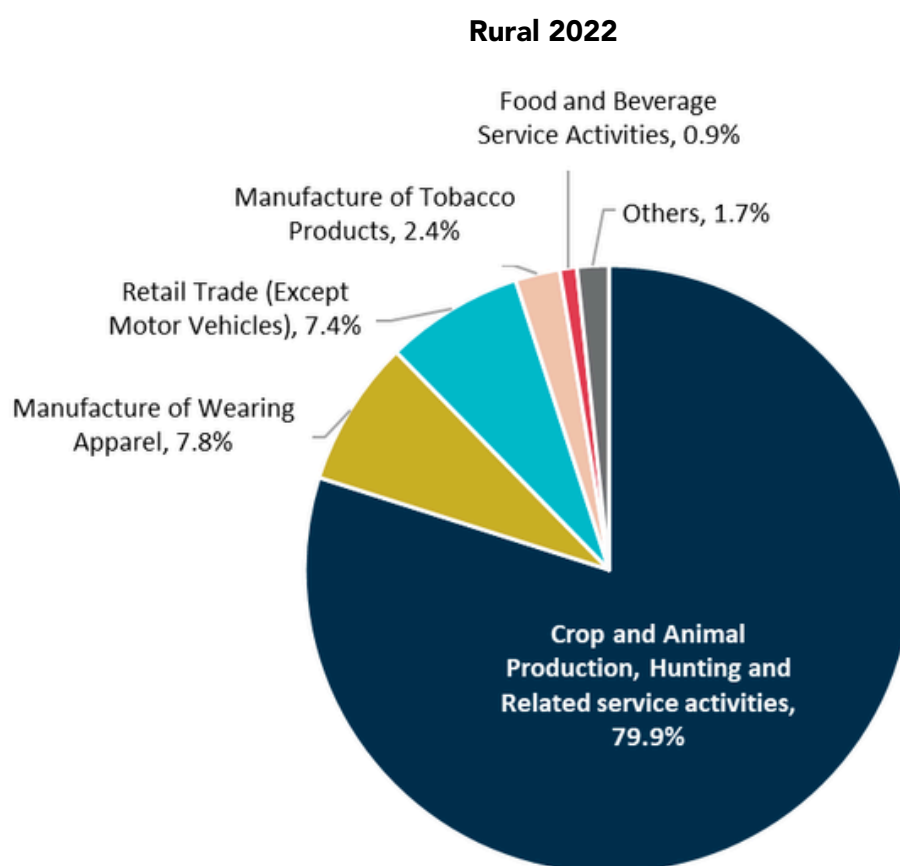
Figure 7: Distribution of women workers within Education



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

- Among self-employed rural women in Karnataka, agriculture remained the dominant industry, although its share declined from 79.9% in 2022 to 77.0% in 2025. Manufacturing of wearing apparel and retail trade also declined slightly, from 7.8% to 7.5% and 7.4% to 6.8%, respectively. In contrast, tobacco manufacturing increased from 2.4% to 4.0%. Overall, agriculture continues to account for the majority of rural women's self-employment, with limited diversification into non-farm activities.

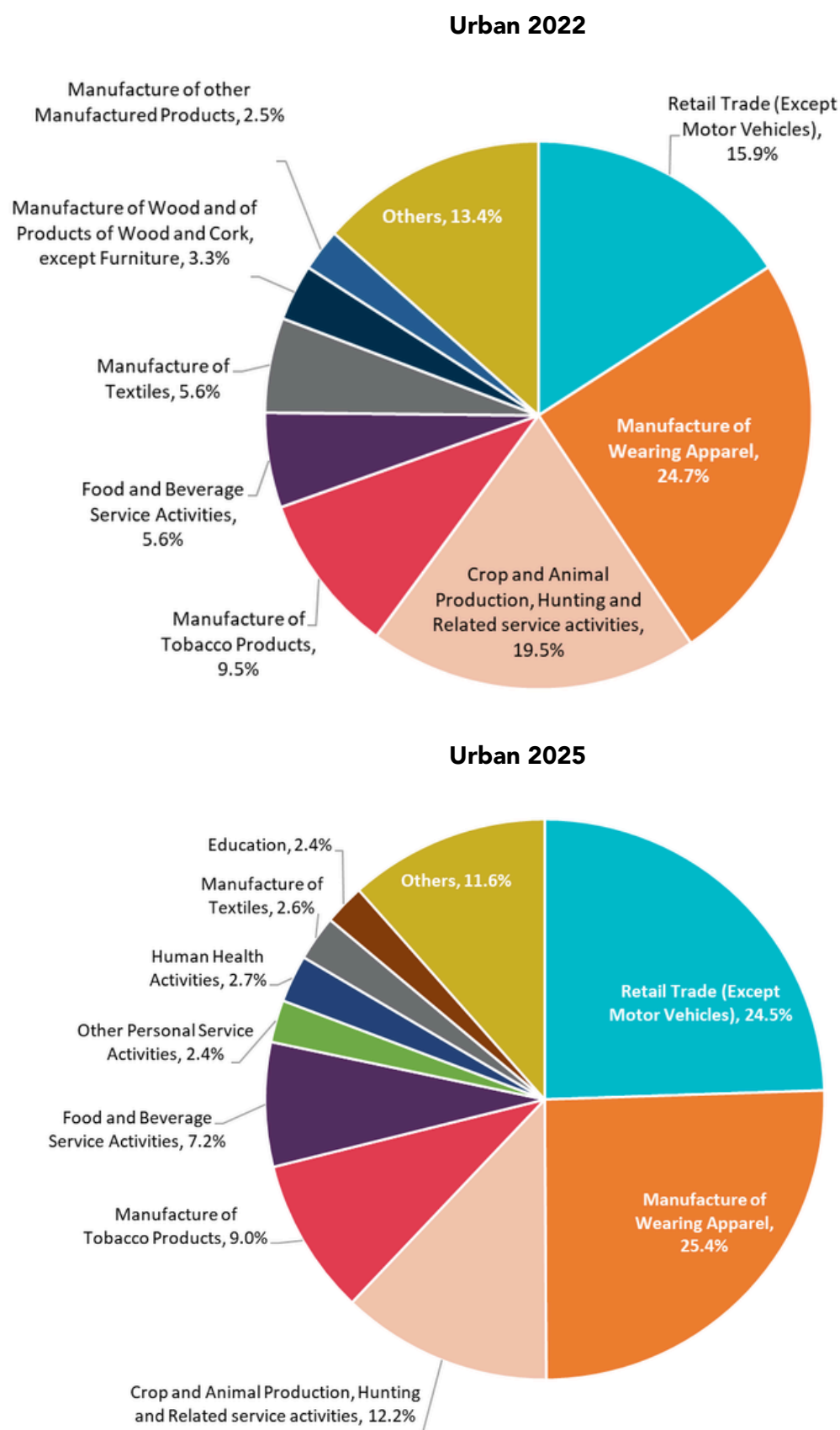
Figure 8A: Distribution of Self-employed women by Broad Industry Types (Rural)



- Self-employed urban women in Karnataka are primarily concentrated in the manufacture of wearing apparel and retail trade, which together accounted for nearly half of urban women's self-employment in 2022 and 2025. Retail trade increased substantially from 15.9% to 24.5%, while apparel manufacturing remained stable at around 25%. In contrast, agriculture-related

activities declined from 19.5% to 12.2%. Food and beverage services also increased from 5.6% to 7.2%, alongside smaller shares in tobacco manufacturing, health, and education. Overall, urban women's self-employment remains relatively diversified, with a shift towards retail and service activities.

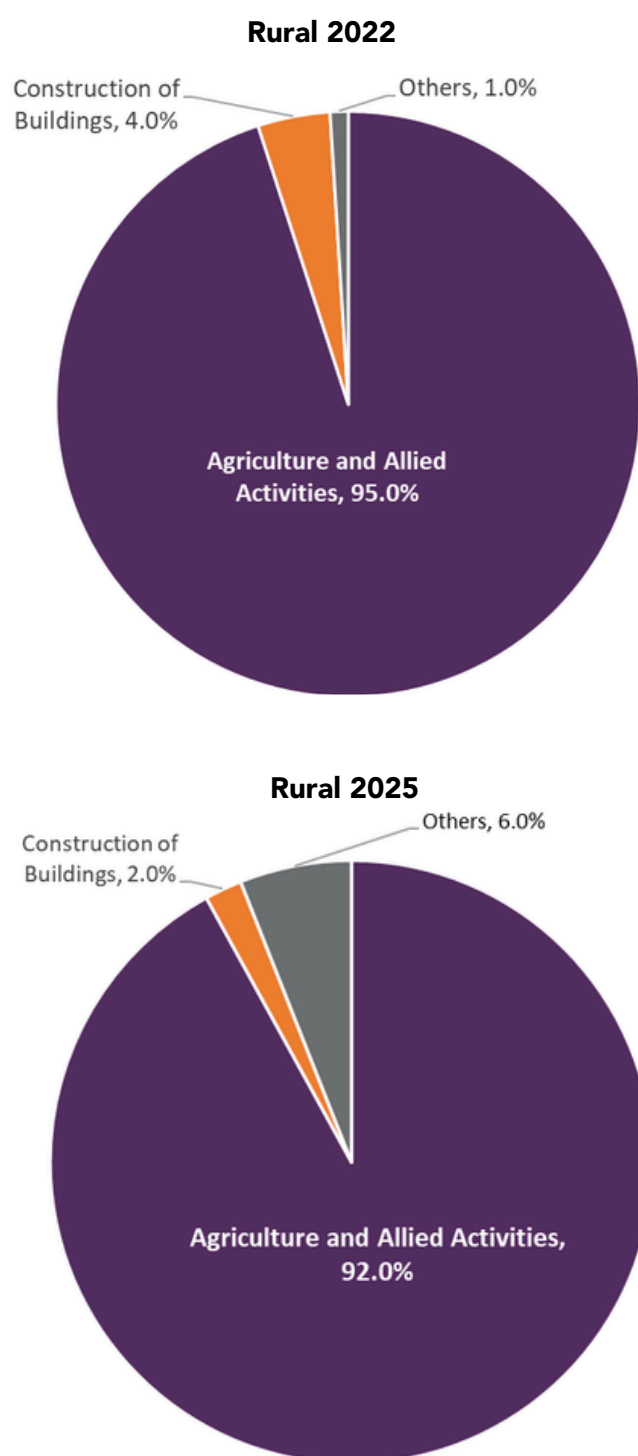
Figure 8B: Distribution of Self-employed women by Broad Industry Types (Urban)



F: Distribution of Casual Women Workers by Broad Industry Types

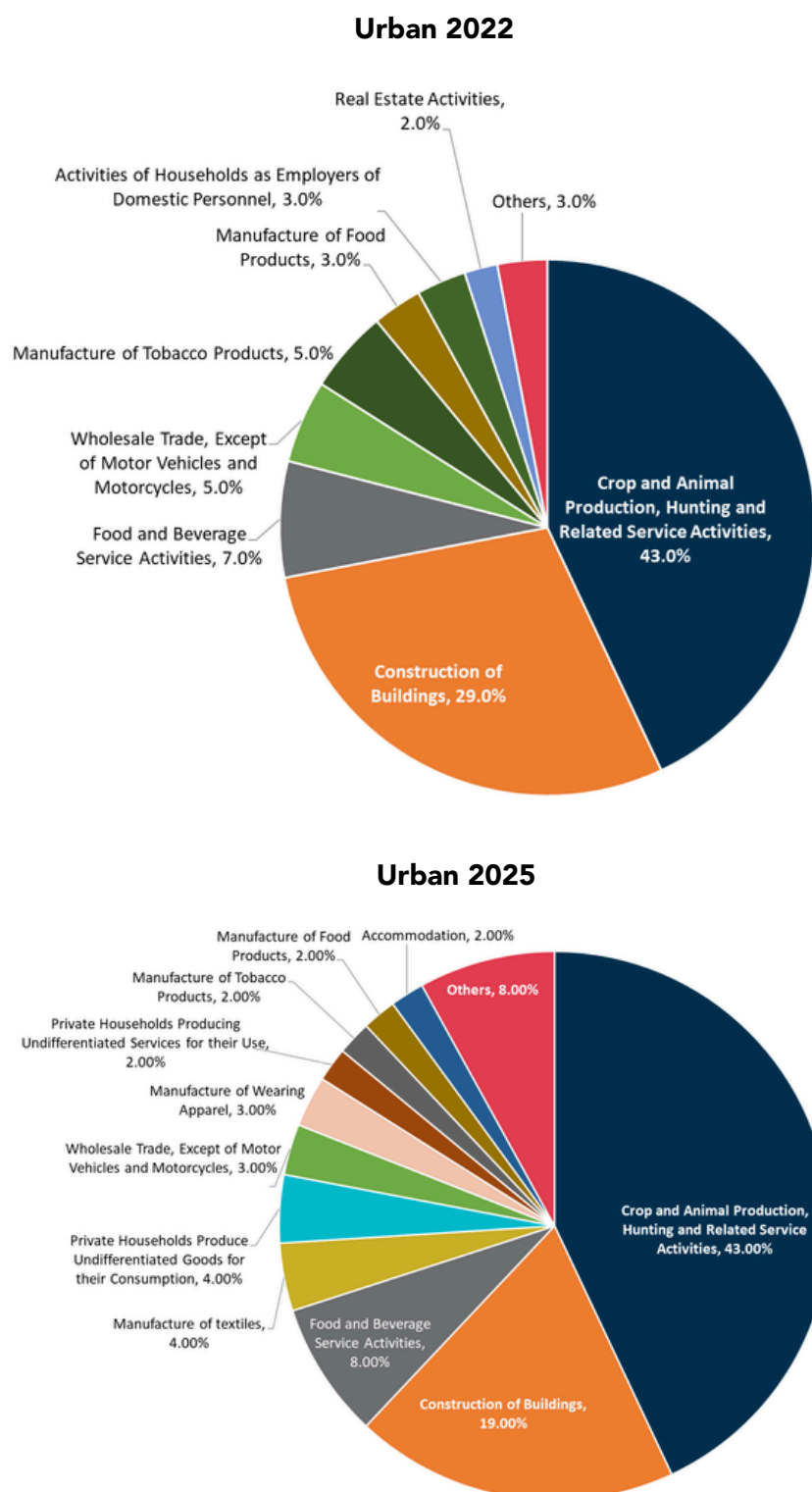
- Among casual rural women workers in Karnataka, agriculture and allied activities overwhelmingly dominated employment, although its share declined slightly from 95.0% in 2022 to 92.0% in 2025. Employment in construction of buildings also declined from 4.0% to 2.0%, while the share in other activities increased from 1.0% to 6.0%. Overall, casual employment among rural women remains highly concentrated in agricultural activities.

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



- Among casual urban women workers in Karnataka, agriculture-related activities remained the largest source of employment, accounting for 43.0% in both 2022 and 2025. Construction declined from 29.0% to 19.0%, while food and beverage services increased slightly from 7.0% to 8.0%. Smaller shares were observed in textiles (4.0%), wholesale trade (3.0%), and wearing apparel manufacturing (3.0%) in 2025. Overall, casual urban women's employment remained concentrated in agriculture and construction, alongside a range of smaller activities.

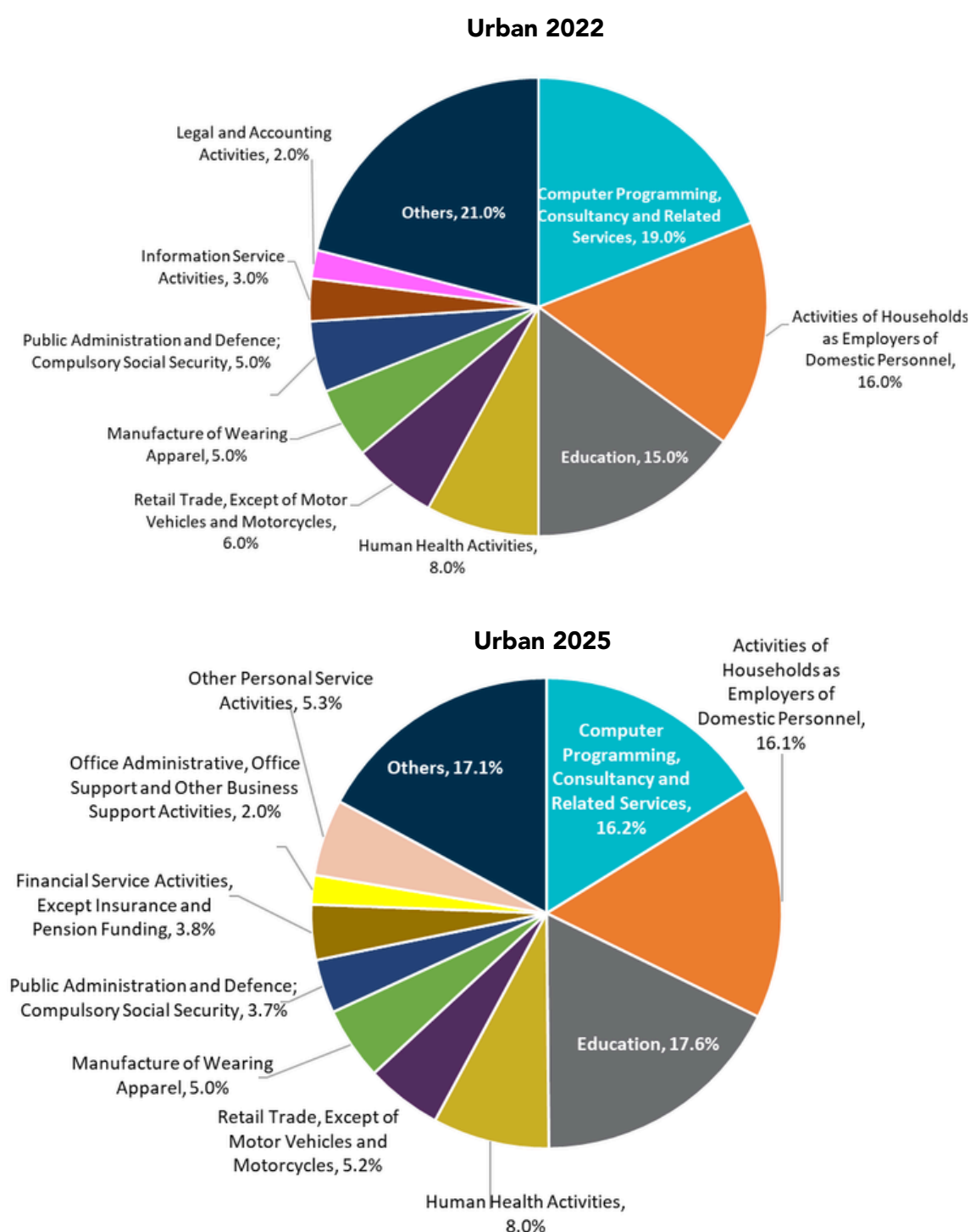
Figure 9B: Distribution of Casual Women Workers by Broad Industry Types (Urban)



G: Distribution of Regular Salaried Women Workers by Broad Industry Types²

- Urban women in regular salaried employment in Karnataka are concentrated in education, computer programming, and domestic work. Between 2022 and 2025, education increased from 15.0% to 17.6%, while computer programming declined from 19.0% to 16.2%. The share engaged as domestic personnel remained stable at around 16%, while health activities remained unchanged at 8.0%. Smaller shares were observed in financial services, personal services, and office support activities in 2025.

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

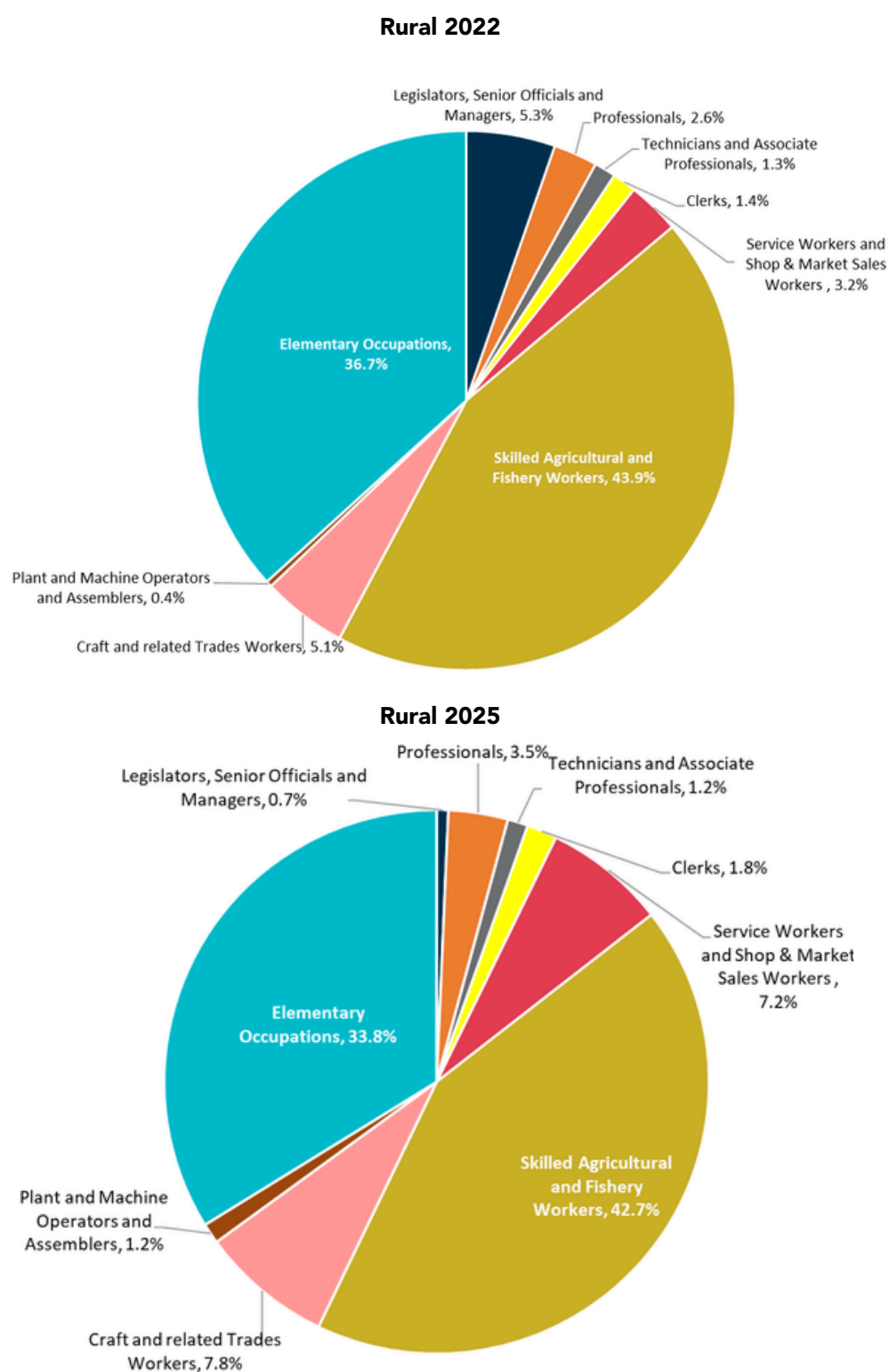


²The sectoral disaggregation of regular salaried employment is presented for urban areas only. The share of regular salaried workers among rural women remains very small making industry-level disaggregation statistically unreliable and analytically less meaningful.

H: Disribution of Women Workers by Occupation Types

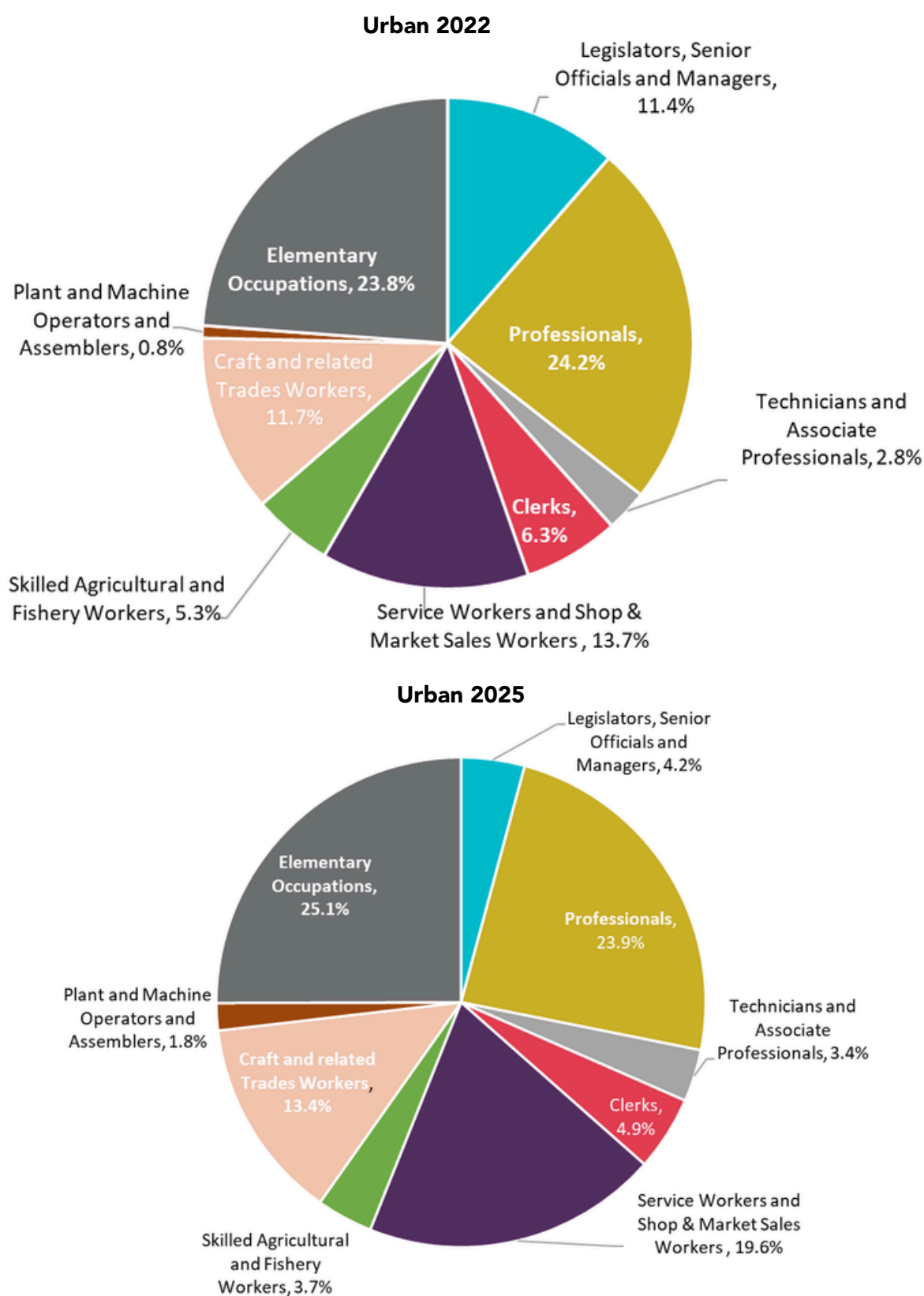
- Women workers in rural Karnataka are primarily concentrated in skilled agricultural and fishery work and elementary occupations, which together accounted for over three-fourths of rural women's employment in both 2022 and 2025. The share of skilled agricultural and fishery workers declined slightly from 43.9% to 42.7%, while elementary occupations fell from 36.7% to 33.8%. Meanwhile, service and sales workers increased from 3.2% to 7.2%, and craft and related trades from 5.1% to 7.8%, indicating some diversification into non-agricultural occupations.

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



- Urban women workers in Karnataka are distributed across a wider range of occupations, with significant concentration in professional, elementary, and service and sales roles. Professionals accounted for 23.9% of employment in 2025, while elementary occupations increased from 23.8% in 2022 to 25.1%. The share of women in managerial roles declined from 11.4% to 4.2%, indicating limited diversification towards higher-skilled occupations.

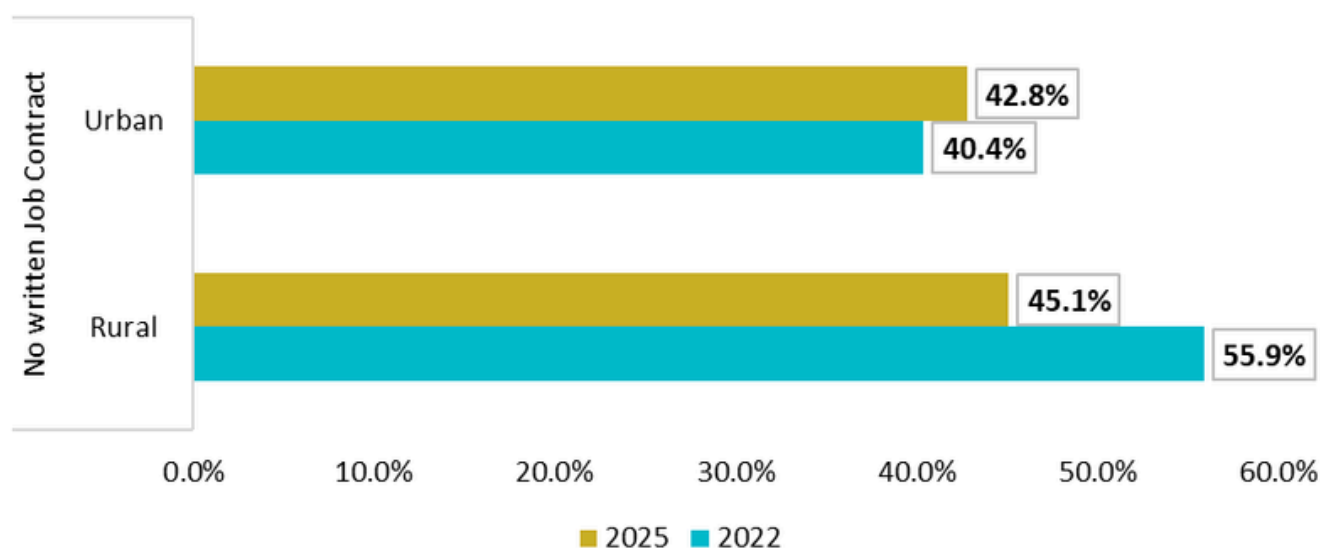
Figure 11B: Occupational Classification of Women Workers (Urban)



I: Condition of Work in Regular Employment

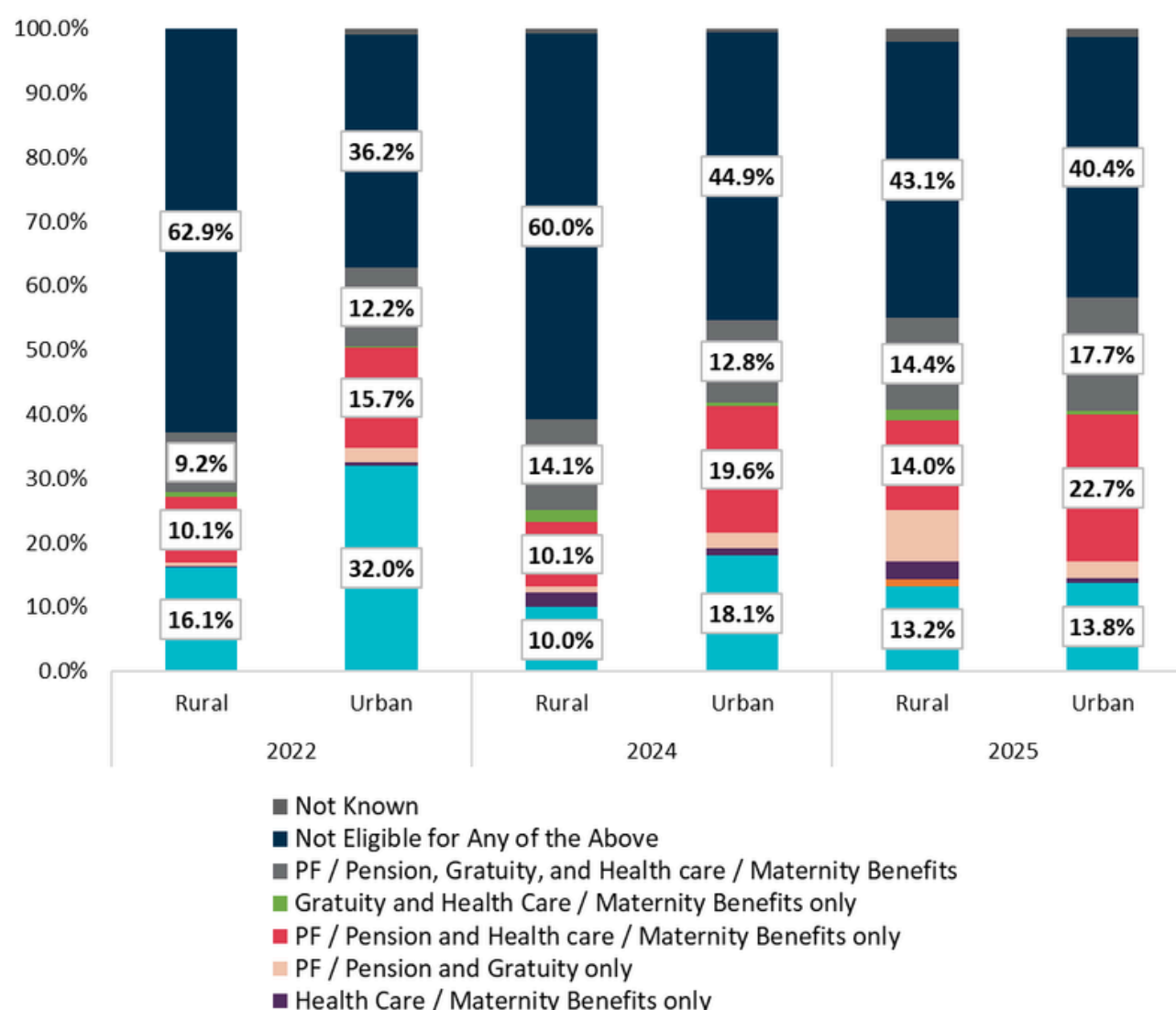
- Despite being engaged in regular salaried employment, a significant share of women workers in Karnataka continue to lack basic job security and social protection. In rural areas, the proportion of women without written job contracts decreased from 55.9% to 45.1%.
- In urban areas, those without written contracts rose from 40.4% to 42.8%. These trends highlight the persistence of informality and insecure working conditions even within regular salaried employment, particularly for women.

Figure 12: Status of Job Contract



- The composition of social security coverage among women in regular salaried employment in Karnataka reveals persistent gaps, particularly in rural areas. A large share of women remained ineligible for any social security benefits, although this declined from 62.9% in rural areas in 2022 to 43.1% in 2025; in urban areas, the share remained comparatively lower but still high at 40.4% in 2025. Over time, there was a gradual increase in women receiving combined benefits such as PF/pension along with health care, maternity benefits, and gratuity.
- Urban women consistently reported higher access to combined social security benefits compared to rural women, especially in categories involving PF/pension and health or maternity coverage. Overall, while coverage appears to be improving gradually, a substantial proportion of women workers continue to remain outside formal social protection systems.

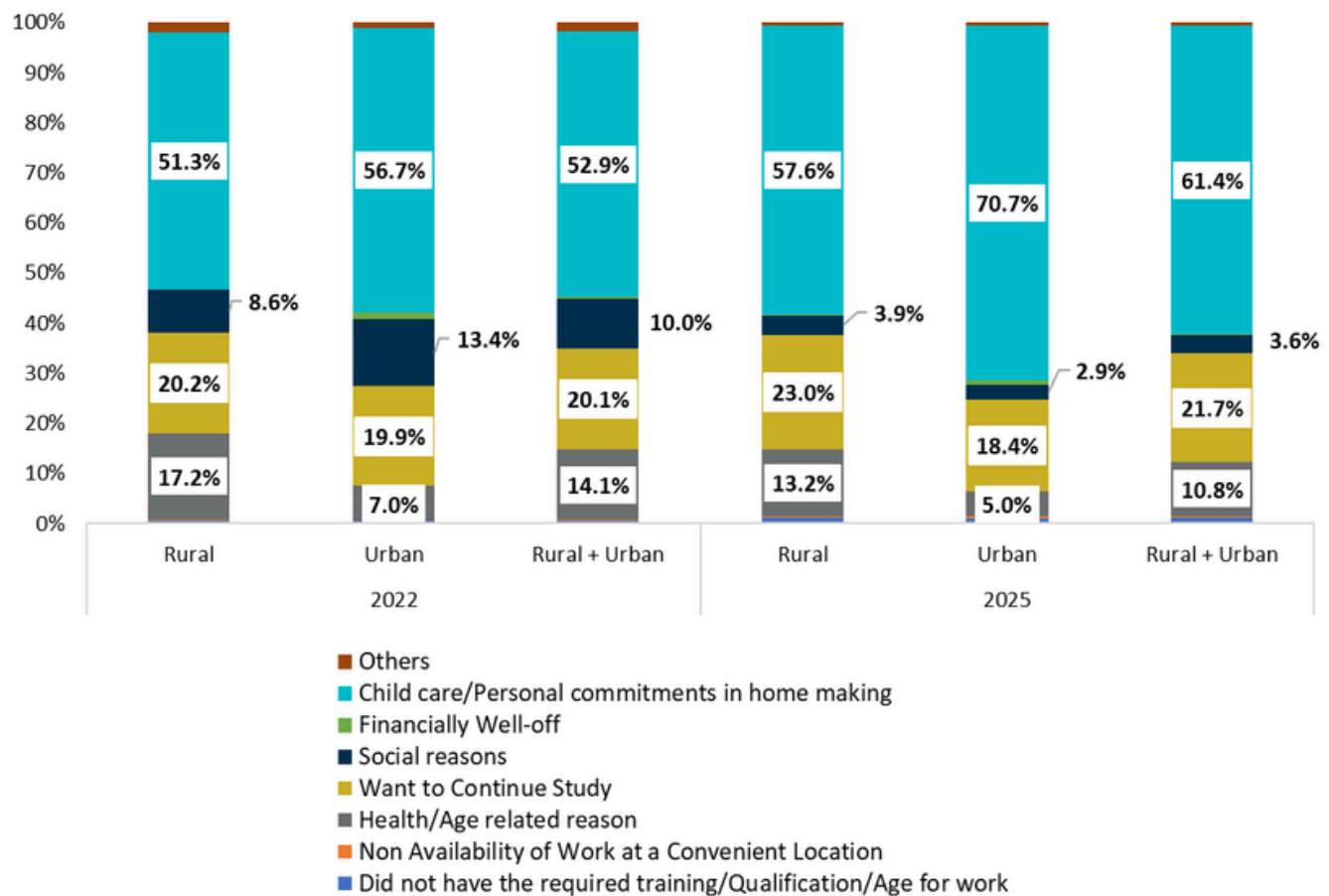
Figure 13: Extent and Composition of Social Security Coverage among Women in Regular Employment (2022–2025)



J: Reason for Not Being in the Labour Force

- The primary reason for women remaining outside the labour force in Karnataka was child care and domestic responsibilities, with the share increasing from 52.9% in 2022 to 61.4% in 2025 overall. This burden was especially high among urban women, rising sharply from 56.7% to 70.7% over the period.
- Continuing education emerged as the second major reason, accounting for around one-fifth of women outside the labour force in both years. Health and age-related reasons declined over time, particularly in rural areas, while social reasons also fell significantly from 10.0% in 2022 to 3.6% in 2025. Overall, the trends highlight the continued dominance of unpaid care and domestic responsibilities as the key barrier to women's labour force participation.

Figure 14: Reason for Not Being in The Labourforce



CONCLUSION

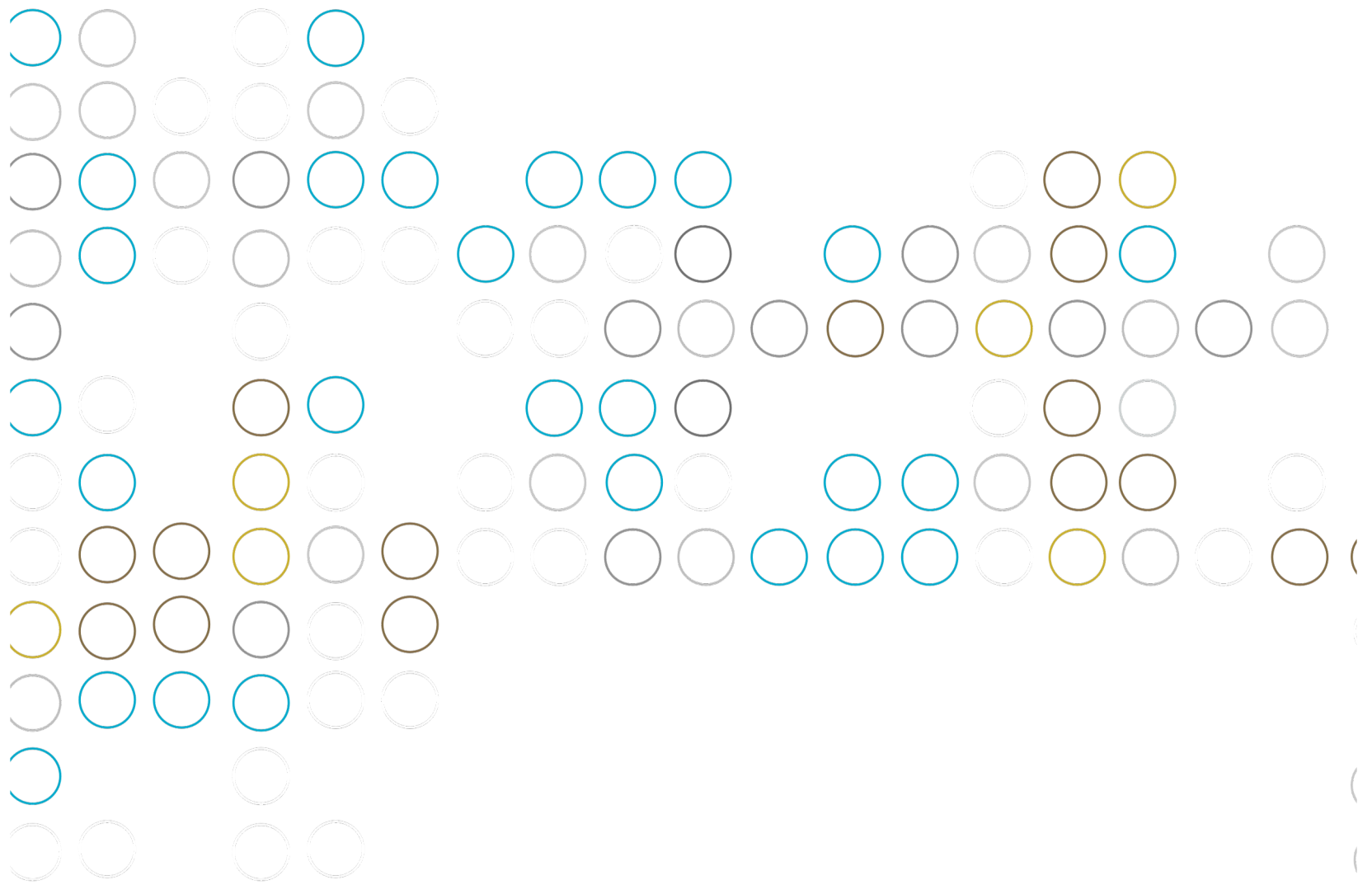
Karnataka's labour market data between 2022 and 2025 reveals a state making incremental gains in women's workforce participation, while continuing to grapple with structural barriers that limit the depth and quality of that participation. Female LFPR has risen across both rural and urban areas, urban women show relatively stronger access to regular salaried employment compared to the national average. However, the data also points to persistent informality even within formal employment categories, continued concentration of women in low-productivity agricultural and domestic work, and a widening care burden, with domestic responsibilities increasingly cited as the primary reason women remain outside the labour force. These trends indicate that rising participation figures do not yet reflect commensurate improvements in employment quality or economic security.

On the policy front, Karnataka has introduced a cluster of demand-side interventions since 2023. Research on the Shakti scheme which provides fare-free transport to women, documents positive effects on women's mobility and employment access, with a state-wide study finding that 19% of lower-income women reported securing new or better employment attributable to fare-free travel, though the same study notes that the scheme in its current form does not produce employment gains at scale and would require redesign to do so. The Gruha Lakshmi direct cash transfer has been associated with improved financial autonomy among beneficiaries, and has explicitly been recognised as the first Indian policy initiative to explicitly acknowledge the economic value of unpaid domestic labour.

The GCC Policy 2024-29 includes commitments to women's workforce development within the formal technology sector, though implementation evidence remains limited.³

For women who remain outside the labour force, domestic and childcare responsibilities constitute the primary and growing barrier to participation. This burden is particularly acute in urban areas, where childcare and domestic responsibilities were cited by 70.7% of women outside the labour force in 2025 and the status of care infrastructure remains comparatively weaker. In rural areas, existing interventions such as the state's Koosina Mane scheme, which helps manage childcare responsibilities to enable women's workforce entry. However, these remain partial responses to a structural problem. A more comprehensive policy approach would need to simultaneously address household infrastructure deficits, workplace safety, the gender pay gap, and the social norms that continue to shape women's relationship with paid work.

³Desk, S. F. (2025, September 29). Karnataka's guarantee schemes uplifted women's living standards: Study. The South First | News, Politics, Sports, Entertainment & Live Updates.
<https://thesouthfirst.com/karnataka/karnatakas-guarantee-schemes-uplifted-womens-living-standards-study/>



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

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