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TRENDS IN FEMALE LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATE

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ABSTRACT

Female labour force participation is an important indicator of women's economic empowerment, gender equality, and inclusive economic development. Despite improvements in women's education and socioeconomic conditions, female participation in the labour market in India continues to remain substantially below male participation, with considerable variations across rural and urban areas, age groups, and states. The present study examines the trends and patterns of female labour force participation in India using secondary data obtained from the Census of India and the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) published by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI). The study analyses historical rural female work participation and recent labour force participation rates under usual status and current weekly status, with particular attention to women aged 15 years and above and young women aged 15–29 years. The findings indicate an overall improvement in female labour force participation in recent years, particularly in rural areas. However, substantial gender and rural–urban disparities continue to persist. Female participation among young women remains considerably lower than male participation, while significant interstate variations are also observed. Andhra Pradesh records a female labour force participation rate among young women that is above the national average, although a considerable gender gap remains. The findings suggest that the recent rise in female labour force participation should be assessed not only in terms of increased participation but also in relation to the nature, security, and quality of employment. The study emphasizes the need for policies promoting education and skill development, decent employment, entrepreneurship, childcare support, workplace safety, social security, and equal employment opportunities to achieve sustained and meaningful improvement in women's participation in India's labour market.

Keywords: Female Labour Force Participation, Rural–Urban Disparities, Periodic Labour Force Survey

Female labour force participation is an important indicator of the economic and social position of women and is closely associated with inclusive growth, poverty reduction, household well-being, and gender equality. The Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) refers to the proportion of the working-age population that is either employed or actively seeking or available for work. It therefore distinguishes the labour force from those who are outside the labour market, such as students, pensioners, and persons engaged exclusively in household duties. The Female Labour Force Participation Rate (FLFPR) measures the proportion of women in the relevant working-age population who are participating in the labour force. Another related indicator is the Work Participation Rate (WPR), which refers to the proportion of the population that is actually engaged in economic activity, including main and marginal work. These indicators are important for assessing the extent to which human resources are utilized in an economy. Higher female participation can contribute to household income, economic independence, improved bargaining power within households, and greater control over economic resources. Women's participation

in productive employment is therefore not only a labour-market issue but also an important dimension of women's empowerment and sustainable development.

Women's participation in the labour market is influenced by a complex interaction of economic, demographic, institutional, and sociocultural factors. Education, age, marital status, fertility, age at marriage, household income, urbanization, economic growth, availability of employment, wages, and the structure of the labour market can affect women's decisions and opportunities to participate. At the same time, social norms and gender roles influence the distribution of paid and unpaid work and can restrict women's mobility and employment choices. In India, these factors are particularly important because women undertake a substantial share of unpaid domestic and care work, while many who participate economically are concentrated in agriculture, self-employment, informal activities, casual work, and unpaid family work. The literature also identifies a non-linear relationship between female labour force participation and socioeconomic development. Klasen and Pieters (2015) identify a U-shaped relationship in India, whereby participation tends to be relatively higher among women at the lower and higher ends of the socioeconomic distribution but lower among women in the middle. Mehrotra and Sinha (2017) similarly highlight the importance of structural constraints in explaining India's relatively low female labour force participation despite improvements in education and economic development. Jayachandran (2021) emphasizes the continuing influence of social norms, marriage, mobility, and women's unpaid care responsibilities on their labour-market participation.

In recent years, female labour force participation in India has attracted renewed attention because recent Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) estimates indicate a considerable improvement in women's participation, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the increase in participation needs to be interpreted carefully because a higher LFPR does not necessarily imply improved access to secure or high-quality employment. Ara and Srivatsav (2025) argue that the recent rise in female labour force participation has been driven substantially by rural women and by participation in own-account and unpaid work, particularly in agriculture and the unorganized sector, while the share of women in regular salaried employment, organized-sector employment, and industry and services has declined in recent years. This highlights the importance of examining not only the level of female participation but also its geographical distribution and the nature of work in which women are engaged. The PLFS provides an important source for such analysis because it enables examination of female labour force participation according to different concepts of status, age groups, rural and urban residence, and states. Recent estimates indicate that participation continues to vary substantially between rural and urban women and between different regions of the country. Such variations reflect differences in employment opportunities, household responsibilities, education, social norms, economic structures, and access to productive work. Consequently, understanding the recent increase in female labour force participation requires consideration of both the quantitative change in participation and the socioeconomic conditions underlying that change.

The aim of the study is to examine the trends and patterns of female labour force participation in India, with particular reference to rural and urban areas, different age groups, and selected states. The study is based on secondary data collected from the Census of India and the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) reports published by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), using descriptive and comparative analysis.

Review of Literature

Sanghi et al. (2015) examine the decline in rural female labour force participation in India and emphasize the role of structural economic changes, limited remunerative employment, low skills, and rising household incomes. They argue that expanding opportunities through self-help groups, microfinance, and flexible employment can help increase rural women's participation.

Dubey et al. (2017) analyse rural female labour force participation using NSS data from 1983 to 2011. They find a long-term decline in women's participation, particularly among Dalit and Adivasi women and poor agricultural households. The study also shows that the trend varies according to the definition of work and women's socioeconomic characteristics, suggesting that multiple economic and social factors influence participation.

Mehrotra and Parida (2017) investigate the determinants of declining female labour force participation and identify structural transformation, agricultural mechanisation, capital-intensive manufacturing, rising household incomes, and social constraints as important factors. They argue that expanding women's education and creating suitable employment opportunities in manufacturing and services could reverse the decline.

Chaudhary et al. (2025) examine long-term changes in female labour force participation and report a substantial decline followed by a sharp recovery in recent years. They highlight the strong influence of rural women on overall trends and argue that conventional surveys may understate women's unpaid, household-based, informal, and emerging forms of work. The study recommends improving labour-force measurement to capture these activities more effectively.

Ara and Shrivastav (2025) examine the recent increase in female labour force participation using PLFS data and argue that much of the increase has been driven by rural self-employment, unpaid family work, and agricultural activities. They caution that higher participation does not necessarily indicate improved economic well-being because many women remain in low-paid, insecure, and vulnerable employment with limited social protection.

Thakur and Singh (2026) study the recent rise in female workforce participation in Assam and find that participation increased in both rural and urban areas, with rural participation remaining higher. Their findings indicate that age, education, vocational training, spouse's employment, and household characteristics significantly influence women's participation, highlighting the importance of individual and socioeconomic factors in shaping female labour force participation.

Rural Female Work Participation Rates in India

Table - 1 presents the rural female work participation rate (FWPR) in India from 1961 to 2011, based on the Census of India. The data reveal considerable fluctuations in the participation of rural women in economic activities over the five-decade period. In 1961, the rural female work participation rate was 31.39 percent, indicating a relatively high level of participation. However, this rate declined sharply to 13.36 percent in 1971, representing the lowest level recorded in the table. This substantial decline may be associated with changes in the measurement and classification of women's work, as well as the under-reporting of women's economic activities, particularly unpaid and household-based work. Following the sharp decline in 1971, the female work participation rate showed a steady recovery from 1981 onward. It increased from 23.18 percent in 1981 to 26.67 percent in 1991 and further to 31.00 percent in 2001. The increase during this period suggests a gradual improvement in the recognition and participation of rural women in economic activities. Greater involvement of women in agriculture, allied activities, informal employment, and other rural occupations may have contributed to this upward trend. In 2011, however, the rural female work participation rate declined slightly to 30.03 percent, compared with 31.00 percent in 2001. Although the decline was relatively small, it indicates that the upward trend observed during the previous three decades did not continue into the 2011 Census period. Overall, the data demonstrate that rural female work participation in India experienced significant fluctuations rather than a consistent upward trend. The rate fell dramatically between 1961 and 1971, followed by a sustained recovery between 1971 and 2001, before experiencing a modest decline in 2011. The increase from 13.36 percent in 1971 to 30.03 percent in 2011 nevertheless represents a substantial improvement over the long term. The trends also highlight the importance of examining women's work beyond conventional paid employment. Rural women are extensively involved in agriculture, livestock rearing, household enterprises, unpaid family work, and other informal activities, some of which may not always be fully captured in statistical measurements. Therefore, changes in the reported participation rate should be interpreted alongside changes in the nature of rural employment and the methods used to measure women's economic contribution.

Table – 1

RURAL FEMALE WORK PARTICIPATION RATES IN INDIA

Year	Female Work Participation Rate
1961	31.39
1971	13.36
1981	23.18
1991	26.67
2001	31.00
2011	30.03

Source: Census of India

Rural Female Labour Force Participation Rate in India 2022-25

The data indicate a clear improvement in rural female labour force participation between 2022 and 2025. Among women aged 15 years and above, LFPR increased from 37.5% in 2022 to 47.3% in 2023, before declining slightly to 45.8% in 2024 and recovering marginally to 45.9% in 2025. A similar pattern was observed among females of all ages, whose LFPR rose from 27.5% to 34.6% over the same period. Thus, despite minor fluctuations after 2023, rural female participation remained substantially higher in 2025 than in 2022.

The LFPR of women aged 15 years and above remained higher than that of females of all ages, reflecting the inclusion of younger individuals in the latter category. Compared with the total population, however, female participation remained lower. In 2025, the LFPR among rural females aged 15 years and above was 45.9%, compared with 62.8% for the total population, indicating a substantial gender gap. Overall, the findings suggest that rural female labour force participation has strengthened in recent years, particularly after 2022, but the persistent gap with overall participation highlights the continuing need to expand suitable, secure, and remunerative employment opportunities for rural women.

Table – 2

RURAL FEMALE LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATE IN INDIA (IN PER CENT) IN USUAL STATUS (PS+SS) ESTIMATED FROM PLFS 2022, PLFS 2023, PLFS 2024 AND PLFS 2025 FOR PERSONS OF AGE 15 YEARS AND ABOVE AND PERSONS OF ALL AGES

PLFS Year	Female 15 years and above	Female All ages	Total persons 15 years and above	Total persons All ages
2022	37.5	27.5	58.5	41.8
2023	47.3	35.3	63.4	46.6
2024	45.8	34.2	62.9	46.2
2025	45.9	34.6	62.8	46.6

Source: Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, National Statistics Office. (2026). *Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS): Annual report 2025 (January–December 2025)*. Government of India.

Urban Female Labour Force Participation Rate in India

Table - 3 presents the urban female Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) in India under the usual status (PS+SS) for the period 2022–2025. The data show a gradual improvement in urban female labour force participation during the period under consideration. Among urban females aged 15 years and above, the LFPR increased from 24.7 percent in 2022 to 27.2 percent in 2023, representing an increase of 2.5 percentage points. The rate continued to increase to 27.6 percent in 2024 and 27.7 percent in 2025. Although the rate of increase became relatively small after 2023, the overall trend remained positive. For urban females of all ages, the LFPR followed a similar pattern. It increased from 19.6 percent in 2022 to 21.7 percent in 2023, followed by a further increase to 22.0 percent in 2024 and 22.2 percent in 2025. Thus, over the four-year period, the all-age female LFPR increased by 2.6 percentage points. This indicates a steady, although relatively modest, improvement in the participation of urban women in the labour force.

The comparison between the two female age groups indicates that the LFPR for females aged 15 years and above remained consistently higher than the LFPR for females of all ages. In 2025, for example, the rate was 27.7 percent for females aged 15 years and above, compared with 22.2 percent for females of all ages. This difference is partly attributable to the inclusion of younger individuals in the all-age population, many of whom are outside the labour force because of education or other reasons. The total population figures also demonstrate a gradual increase in urban labour force participation. Among persons aged 15 years and above, the total LFPR rose from 50.0 percent in 2022 to 51.4 percent in 2023, reaching 52.2 percent in 2024, where it remained unchanged in 2025. Similarly, for persons of all ages, the total LFPR increased from 39.4 percent in 2022 to 40.6 percent in 2023, followed by increases to 41.1 percent in 2024 and 41.3 percent in 2025. Despite the positive trend in urban female participation, the data reveal a substantial gender gap. In 2025, the LFPR for urban females aged 15 years and above was 27.7 percent, compared with 52.2 percent for the total population, producing a gap of 24.5 percentage points. For all ages, the female LFPR was 22.2 percent, compared with 41.3 percent for the total population, resulting in a difference of 19.1 percentage points. Therefore, although female participation has improved, urban women continue to participate in the labour force at considerably lower rates than the overall population.

When compared with the rural figures presented in Table 2, the urban female LFPR is notably lower. In 2025, the LFPR for rural females aged 15 years and above was 45.9 percent, whereas the corresponding urban rate was 27.7 percent. Similarly, for females of all ages, the rural rate was 34.6 percent, compared with 22.2 percent in urban areas. This indicates a significant rural–urban difference in female labour force participation. The lower urban female LFPR may be related to several socioeconomic factors, including the nature of available employment, educational participation, household responsibilities, social norms, occupational requirements, and the difficulties associated with balancing paid employment and domestic responsibilities. At the same time, urban labour markets may offer greater opportunities for formal and skilled employment, but access to such employment may require education, skills, mobility, and suitable working conditions.

Table – 3

URBAN FEMALE LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATE (IN PER CENT) IN INDIA, IN USUAL STATUS (PS+SS) ESTIMATED FROM PLFS 2022, PLFS 2023, PLFS 2024 AND PLFS 2025 FOR PERSONS OF AGE 15 YEARS AND ABOVE AND PERSONS OF ALL AGES

PLFS Year	Female 15 years and above	Female All ages	Total persons 15 years and above	Total persons All ages
2022	24.7	19.6	50.0	39.4
2023	27.2	21.7	51.4	40.6
2024	27.6	22.0	52.2	41.1
2025	27.7	22.2	52.2	41.3

Source: Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, National Statistics Office. (2026). *Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS): Annual report 2025 (January–December 2025)*. Government of India.

Total Female Labour Force Participation Rate in India

Table - 4 presents the total female Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) in India, combining rural and urban areas, for the period 2022 to 2025. The data indicate a substantial improvement in female labour force participation between 2022 and 2023. Among females aged 15 years and above, the LFPR increased from 33.9 percent in 2022 to 41.3 percent in 2023, representing an increase of 7.4 percentage points. This was the largest annual increase during the period. However, the female LFPR subsequently declined slightly to 40.3 percent in 2024 and further to 40.0 percent in 2025. Despite these declines, the 2025 rate remained 6.1 percentage points higher than the 2022 level, indicating a substantial overall improvement.

A similar trend is observed among females of all ages. The LFPR increased from 25.4 percent in 2022 to 31.5 percent in 2023, representing an increase of 6.1 percentage points. It then decreased slightly to 30.7 percent in 2024, where it remained unchanged in 2025. Thus, the female all-age LFPR in 2025 was 5.3 percentage points higher than in 2022. The stabilization between 2024 and 2025 suggests that female labour force participation remained relatively steady after the significant improvement recorded in 2023. The figures for the total population aged 15 years and above show a relatively different pattern. The overall LFPR increased from 56.1 percent in 2022 to 59.8 percent in 2023. It declined marginally to 59.6 percent in 2024 and 59.3 percent in 2025. Despite this decline, the 2025 figure remained higher than the 2022 level. For the total population of all ages, the LFPR increased from 41.1 percent in 2022 to 44.9 percent in 2023, declined slightly to 44.7 percent in 2024, and returned to 44.9 percent in 2025.

The comparison between female and total LFPR highlights a persistent gender gap in labour force participation. In 2025, females aged 15 years and above had an LFPR of 40.0 percent, compared with 59.3 percent for the total population. This represents a gap of 19.3 percentage points. Among persons of all ages, the female LFPR was 30.7 percent, compared with 44.9 percent for the total population, resulting in a difference of 14.2 percentage points. Although women's participation has improved considerably since 2022, the data indicate that female participation continues to remain below the overall labour force participation rate.

The combined rural and urban figures also provide an important perspective when considered alongside Tables 2 and 3. The rural female LFPR in 2025 was considerably higher than the urban female LFPR. For females aged 15 years and above, the rural rate was 45.9 percent, compared with 27.7 percent in urban areas. The corresponding rates for females of all ages were 34.6 percent in rural areas and 22.2 percent in urban areas. Consequently, the national female LFPR lies between the rural and urban levels, reflecting the combined influence of the two sectors. The higher rural female LFPR may partly reflect women's participation in agriculture, allied activities, self-employment, casual work, and unpaid family work, where women's economic activities may be closely integrated with household production. In urban areas, participation may be influenced more strongly by educational attainment, availability of suitable employment, occupational requirements, childcare responsibilities, household income, and social and cultural factors. Therefore, differences between rural and urban female LFPR should be interpreted in relation to the nature and quality of employment, and not only the proportion of women participating in the labour force. The overall trend from 2022 to 2025 is therefore characterized by a sharp improvement in female labour force participation in 2023, followed by moderate declines and stabilization in 2024 and 2025. The increase between 2022 and 2025 is nevertheless significant and suggests an improvement in women's engagement with the labour market at the national level.

Table – 4

TOTAL (RURAL AND URBAN) FEMALE LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATE (IN PER CENT) IN INDIA, 2022-2025 IN USUAL STATUS (PS+SS) ESTIMATED FROM PLFS 2022, PLFS 2023, PLFS 2024 AND PLFS 2025 FOR PERSONS OF AGE 15 YEARS AND ABOVE AND PERSONS OF ALL AGES

PLFS Year	Female 15 years and above	Female All ages	Total persons 15 years and above	Total persons All ages
2022	33.9	25.4	56.1	41.1
2023	41.3	31.5	59.8	44.9
2024	40.3	30.7	59.6	44.7
2025	40.0	30.7	59.3	44.9

Source: Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, National Statistics Office. (2026). *Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS): Annual report 2025 (January–December 2025)*. Government of India.

Table -5 presents the Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) in India under the Current Weekly Status (CWS) for the period from April–June 2025 to April–June 2026. For the 15–29-year age group, the All-India female LFPR fluctuated moderately during the period. It was 22.1 percent in April–June 2025, declined to 21.4 percent in July–September 2025, increased to 22.3 percent in October–December 2025, and reached 22.5 percent in January–March 2026. However, it declined to 21.0 percent in April–June 2026. Thus, the latest quarter recorded a decline of 1.1 percentage points compared with April–June 2025.

The rural female LFPR for young women was 22.5 percent in April–June 2025 and declined to 21.0 percent by April–June 2026. In urban areas, female LFPR declined slightly from 21.3 percent to 20.8 percent during the same period. This indicates that young women's participation remained relatively low in both rural and urban areas, with rural participation consistently slightly higher than urban participation. The gender difference among young people is particularly pronounced. In April–June 2026, the All-India LFPR was 60.4 percent for males compared with only 21.0 percent for females, resulting in a gender gap of 39.4 percentage points. This substantial difference indicates that young women continue to face significant barriers to entering or remaining in the labour force.

Among persons aged 15 years and above, the All-India female LFPR was 33.4 percent in April–June 2025. It increased gradually to 33.7 percent in July–September 2025 and 34.9 percent in October–December 2025. It then declined slightly to 34.7 percent in January–March 2026 and further to 33.2 percent in April–June 2026. The latest figure of 33.2 percent represents a decline of 0.2 percentage points compared with April–June 2025. Therefore, despite fluctuations during the year, the overall female participation rate among persons aged 15 years and above remained relatively stable. A clear rural–urban difference is visible. In April–June 2026, the rural female LFPR was 37.2 percent, whereas the urban female LFPR was 25.0 percent. Rural female participation was therefore 12.2 percentage points higher than urban female participation. The All-India male LFPR for this age group was 77.0 percent, compared with 33.2 percent for females, resulting in a gender gap of 43.8 percentage points. Although women's participation is considerably lower than men's, the rural female LFPR of 37.2 percent indicates greater labour force participation among rural women than their urban counterparts.

For the all-age population, the All-India female LFPR was 25.6 percent in April–June 2025. It increased to 25.9 percent in July–September 2025 and 26.8 percent in October–December 2025, before declining to 26.6 percent in January–March 2026 and 25.5 percent in April–June 2026. Thus, the female LFPR for all ages in April–June 2026 was almost identical to the level recorded in April–June 2025, declining by only 0.1 percentage point. This indicates relative stability in female labour force participation when the entire population is considered. The rural female LFPR was 28.1 percent in April–June 2026, compared with 19.9 percent in urban areas. The rural–urban difference of 8.2 percentage points again demonstrates that rural women participate in the labour force at a substantially higher rate than urban women.

At the All-India level, the male LFPR for all ages was 57.7 percent, compared with 25.5 percent for females. The resulting gender gap of 32.2 percentage points remains considerable.

Table - 5

LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATE (IN PER CENT) IN CWS IN INDIA APRIL – JUNE 2026
PLFS SURVEY

Survey period	Rural Male	Rural Female	Rural Person	Urban Male	Urban Female	Urban Person	All-India Male	All-India Female	All-India Person
Age: 15–29 years									
April-June, 2025	62.6	22.5	42.3	59.3	21.3	41.3	61.5	22.1	42.0
July-Sept, 2025	61.9	21.3	41.3	59.6	21.4	41.4	61.1	21.4	41.3
Oct-Dec, 2025	62.2	22.8	42.0	59.6	21.3	41.3	61.3	22.3	41.8
Jan-March, 2026	61.4	23.2	42.0	59.6	21.1	41.1	60.8	22.5	41.7
April-June, 2026	60.6	21.0	40.5	60.0	20.8	41.2	60.4	21.0	40.7
Age: 15 years and above									
April-June, 2025	78.4	37.0	57.1	75.1	25.6	50.6	77.3	33.4	55.0
July-Sept, 2025	78.2	37.5	57.2	75.3	25.8	50.7	77.2	33.7	55.1
Oct-Dec, 2025	78.8	39.4	58.4	75.1	25.5	50.4	77.6	34.9	55.8

Jan-March, 2026	78.6	39.2	58.2	75.0	25.4	50.2	77.3	34.7	55.5
April-June, 2026	77.9	37.2	56.9	75.3	25.0	50.2	77.0	33.2	54.6
Age: All ages									
April-June, 2025	57.0	27.9	42.3	58.5	20.4	39.9	57.5	25.6	41.5
July-Sept, 2025	56.7	28.2	42.3	59.1	20.7	40.2	57.5	25.9	41.6
Oct-Dec, 2025	57.3	29.6	43.2	59.0	20.4	40.0	57.8	26.8	42.2
Jan-March, 2026	57.1	29.5	43.1	58.6	20.3	39.7	57.6	26.6	42.0
April-June, 2026	56.9	28.1	42.3	59.2	19.9	39.7	57.7	25.5	41.5

Source: Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, National Statistics Office. (2026, August 10). *Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS): Quarterly bulletin, April–June 2026*. Government of India.

Labour Force Participation Rate in Selected States of India

Table- 6 presents the Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) for persons aged 15–29 years according to the Current Weekly Status (CWS) during April–June 2026. The findings indicate a substantial gender disparity in labour force participation among young people aged 15–29 years in India. At the All-India level, male LFPR was 60.4%, compared with only 21.0% for females, resulting in a gender gap of 39.4 percentage points. Considerable interstate variation was also observed, with the highest female LFPR recorded in Jammu and Kashmir (34.2%), followed by Kerala (33.9%) and Rajasthan (33.5%), while Bihar (9.2%), Haryana (10.6%), and Delhi (10.8%) recorded the lowest rates. Andhra Pradesh, with a combined female LFPR of 25.6%, performed above the national average of 21.0%, with participation higher in rural areas (27.4%) than urban areas (22.7%). Although the rural–urban difference at the national level was small (21.0% rural and 20.8% urban), substantial variations were evident across states. The gender gap remained significant even in states with relatively high female participation, although Kerala and Jammu and Kashmir recorded comparatively narrower gaps. Overall, the findings demonstrate that young women's participation in the labour market remains considerably lower than men's and varies widely across states, highlighting the need for state-specific measures focusing on skill development, employment opportunities, safe workplaces, mobility, and reducing social and household barriers to women's economic participation.

Table – 6

LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATE (LFPR) (IN PER CENT) ACCORDING TO CURRENT WEEKLY STATUS FOR SELECTED STATES AGE GROUP: 15–29 YEARS DURING APRIL–JUNE 2026

State	Rural Male	Rural Female	Rural Person	Urban Male	Urban Female	Urban Person	Rural + Urban Male	Rural + Urban Female	Rural + Urban Person
Andhra Pradesh	67.3	27.4	46.3	61.8	22.7	40.0	65.3	25.6	44.0
Assam	66.4	27.2	45.4	52.5	28.1	40.3	64.9	27.3	44.9
Bihar	51.5	9.4	28.8	48.8	7.9	30.1	51.1	9.2	29.0
Chhattisgarh	67.4	17.2	42.4	59.3	20.8	40.6	65.7	17.9	42.0
Delhi	35.2	3.9	20.7	45.9	10.9	31.0	45.8	10.8	30.8
Gujarat	72.3	27.9	50.7	68.0	24.6	48.3	70.4	26.6	49.7
Haryana	53.4	9.1	32.8	61.1	12.6	39.7	57.0	10.6	36.0
Himachal Pradesh	59.5	33.9	46.4	61.1	22.8	42.1	59.8	32.3	45.8
Jharkhand	55.6	15.8	34.3	44.1	11.8	28.2	53.3	15.1	33.2
Karnataka	67.2	21.3	44.8	60.5	20.7	41.8	63.9	21.0	43.4
Kerala	53.2	37.0	45.0	52.6	30.9	42.1	52.9	33.9	43.5
Madhya Pradesh	69.6	21.5	46.5	65.9	17.9	42.5	68.5	20.5	45.3
Maharashtra	56.2	21.8	40.8	59.9	22.1	42.1	58.0	21.9	41.4
Odisha	63.3	25.0	43.4	57.0	21.2	37.7	62.3	24.3	42.4
Punjab	69.6	23.5	48.6	65.4	24.8	46.4	67.8	24.1	47.6
Rajasthan	58.2	38.3	48.1	62.4	20.2	43.8	59.6	33.5	46.8
Tamil Nadu	56.2	25.7	41.0	62.4	25.2	43.9	59.4	25.5	42.5
Telangana	62.2	28.1	46.0	60.4	25.8	43.2	61.3	26.9	44.6
Uttarakhand	58.7	30.0	45.5	61.2	14.4	39.8	59.5	25.3	43.8
Uttar Pradesh	56.5	14.1	34.5	59.1	14.9	37.8	57.2	14.2	35.2
West Bengal	68.9	21.9	43.0	63.4	24.6	43.0	67.3	22.6	43.0
Jammu & Kashmir	55.8	35.0	45.5	55.0	31.1	43.6	55.6	34.2	45.1
All-India	60.6	21.0	40.5	60.0	20.8	41.2	60.4	21.0	40.7

Source: Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, National Statistics Office. (2026, August 10). *Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS): Quarterly bulletin, April–June 2026*. Government of India.

Conclusion

The present study provides an overview of the changing pattern of female labour force participation in India over time, with particular emphasis on rural and urban areas, different age groups, and variations across states. The findings indicate that women's participation in the labour force has improved over the long term, particularly in recent years, but substantial gender, rural–urban, age, and regional disparities continue to persist. The historical trend in rural female work participation demonstrates considerable fluctuations over the decades. Female work participation declined sharply during the early period but subsequently recovered, reaching a level close to that observed in the early 1960s by 2011. The recent Periodic Labour Force Survey estimates indicate a significant improvement in female labour force participation, particularly in rural India. Among females aged 15 years and above, rural participation increased substantially between 2022 and 2025. Although the rate experienced a slight decline after the sharp increase recorded in 2023, the level in 2025 remained considerably higher than in 2022. This suggests an overall strengthening of rural women's engagement with the labour force.

At the national level, female labour force participation among women aged 15 years and above increased considerably between 2022 and 2025. The substantial improvement recorded during this period is an encouraging development in the context of women's economic empowerment and India's changing labour market. However, the slight decline observed after 2023 suggests that the improvement has not been completely linear. Sustaining the gains in female labour force participation therefore requires continuous policy support and the creation of stable and productive employment opportunities. The latest Current Weekly Status estimates further demonstrate that female labour force participation varies considerably by age. Young women aged 15–29 years have substantially lower participation than older working-age women. This is an important concern because the participation of young women is closely associated with their transition from education and household responsibilities into employment. Greater opportunities for vocational education, technical training, skill development, entrepreneurship, and decent employment can play an important role in improving the economic participation of young women. The findings also reveal considerable interstate variation in female labour force participation among young women. Some states recorded female participation substantially above the national average, whereas others recorded very low levels. Such differences demonstrate that female labour force participation is closely associated with regional economic structures, employment opportunities, educational conditions, social norms, and the availability of suitable work. Therefore, a uniform national approach may not be sufficient, and state-specific strategies are necessary to address the particular barriers faced by women in different regions. The position of Andhra Pradesh is relatively encouraging, as young women's labour force participation is above the national average. Nevertheless, a substantial gap remains between male and female participation. This suggests that Andhra Pradesh has made progress in creating conditions for women's participation but still has considerable scope for improving women's access to stable, remunerative, and productive employment.

In conclusion, the study demonstrates that female labour force participation in India has shown substantial improvement, particularly during the recent PLFS period, but the progress remains uneven and significant disparities continue to exist. The challenge is no longer limited to increasing the number of women participating in the labour force; it is equally important to ensure that women obtain decent, secure, productive, and adequately remunerated employment. Sustained efforts to remove structural, economic, and social barriers can transform the recent increase in female labour force participation into meaningful and sustainable economic empowerment of women and inclusive economic development in India.

To improve female labour force participation in India, a comprehensive approach is required that addresses both economic and social barriers. Greater investment in girls' and women's education, vocational training, digital skills, and market-oriented skill development can improve their employability and access to better-paid occupations. Employment opportunities should be expanded in both rural and urban areas through support for women-owned enterprises, self-employment, entrepreneurship, agricultural and non-agricultural activities, and formal employment. Provision of affordable childcare and elderly-care services, flexible working arrangements, safe and reliable transportation, and secure workplaces can help women balance paid employment with household responsibilities. Special attention should be given to young women through career counselling, apprenticeships, internships, and employment-linked skill programmes. In rural areas, improving women's access to credit, technology, markets, land and productive assets can strengthen their economic independence. Employers and institutions should also ensure equal remuneration, social security, maternity protection, workplace safety, and opportunities for career advancement. Finally, policies should address social norms and the unequal distribution of unpaid domestic and care work by promoting greater participation of men in household responsibilities.

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