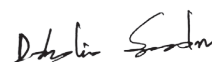


## Editorial

The decision of and ability for women to participate in the labour force is the outcome of various economic and social factors that interact in a complex fashion at both the household and macro-level. Based on global evidence, some of the most important drivers include educational attainment, fertility rates and the age of marriage, economic growth/cyclical effects, and urbanization. In addition to these issues, social norms determining the role of women in the public domain continue to affect outcomes. In India, much of the discussion on the falling trends has focused on different explanations i.e., rising educational enrolment of young women; lack of employment opportunities; effect of household income on participation; measurement etc. Over the last decade or so, India has made considerable progress in increasing access to education for girls as increasing numbers of women of working age are enrolling in secondary schools. Nonetheless, the nature of economic growth in the country has meant that jobs were not created in large numbers in sectors that could readily absorb women, especially for those in rural areas. Despite inadequate job creation, household incomes did raise, which potentially reduced women's participation, especially in subsidiary activities due to change in preferences. Finally, though most women in India work and contribute to the economy in one form or another, much of their work is not documented or accounted for in official statistics, and thus women's work tends to be under-reported. It has been observed that the work participation rate (WPR) of women in the 15-59 age group (productive age group) had declined between 2004-05 and 2017-18 though it has increased marginally by 1.2 percentage points from 23.8 per cent in 2017-18 to 25.0 per cent in 2018-19. In the year 2004-05, the WPR for women was 44.2 percent which means there was a decline by 19.2 per cent during 2018-19. The gender gaps in WPR was quite evident with a 48.5 percentage point gap between males and female WPRs in rural areas and 53.5 percentage points in urban areas in 15-59 age group in 2018-19. Also, there has been a change in the nature of employment wherein there was an increase in self-employment for women in rural areas although for urban areas it has almost remained the same. Further, the sectoral shifts in female WPR raise several questions on the nature of employment, employment conditions and access to social security. Therefore, a policy framework encouraging and enabling women's participation should be constructed with active awareness of the "gender-specific" constraints that face most women. Gender-responsive policies need to be contextually developed. Ultimately, the goal is not merely to increase female labour force participation, but to provide opportunities for decent work that will, in turn, contribute to the economic empowerment of women.

Editor-in-Chief



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