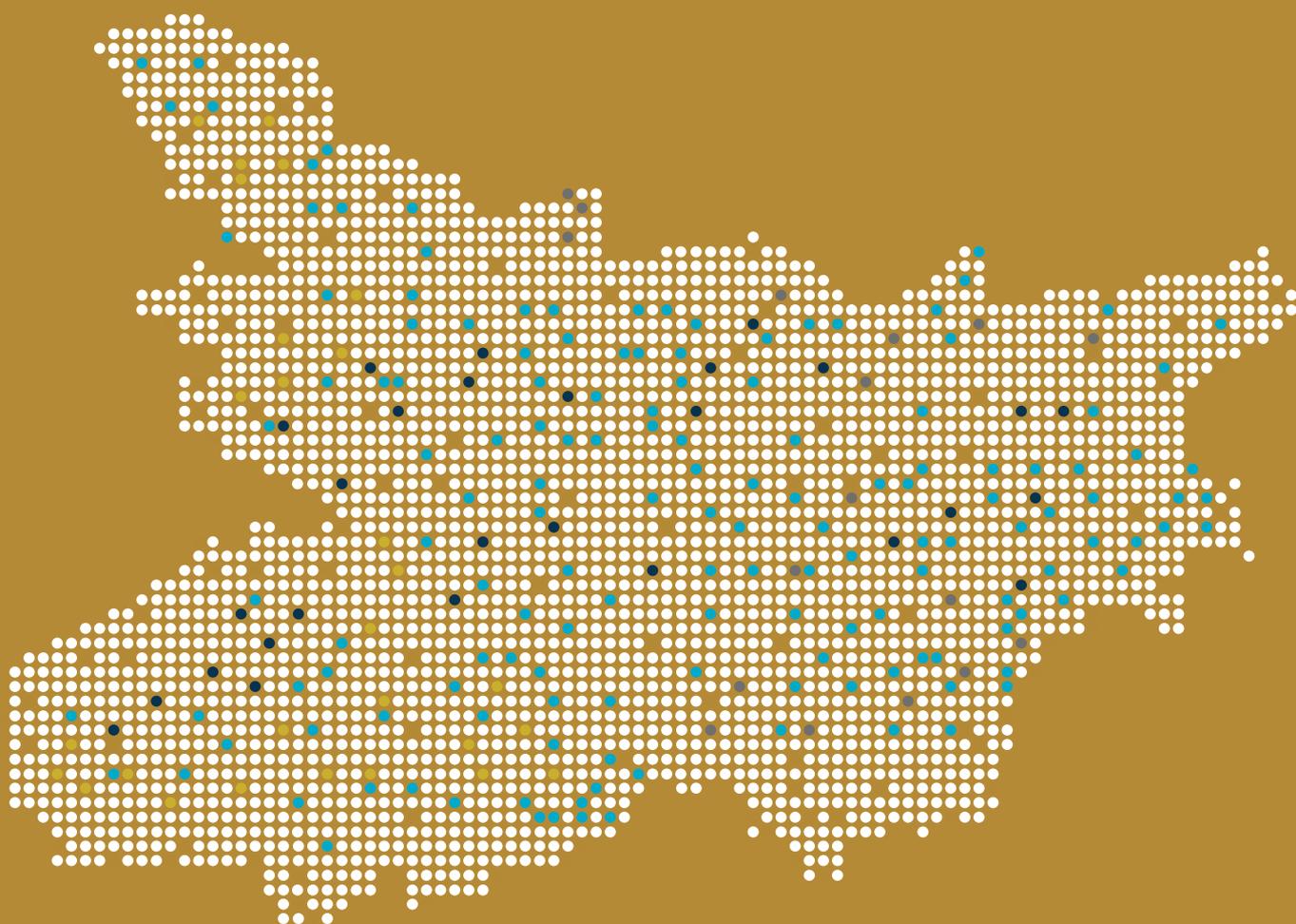
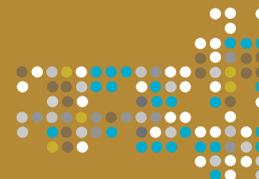


TREND IN FEMALE LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION IN BIHAR



This series of state fact sheets highlight important aspects of the status of women's employment in Bihar. The factsheets use secondary data provided by the National Sample Surveys' Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), 2017-18 to 2023-24.



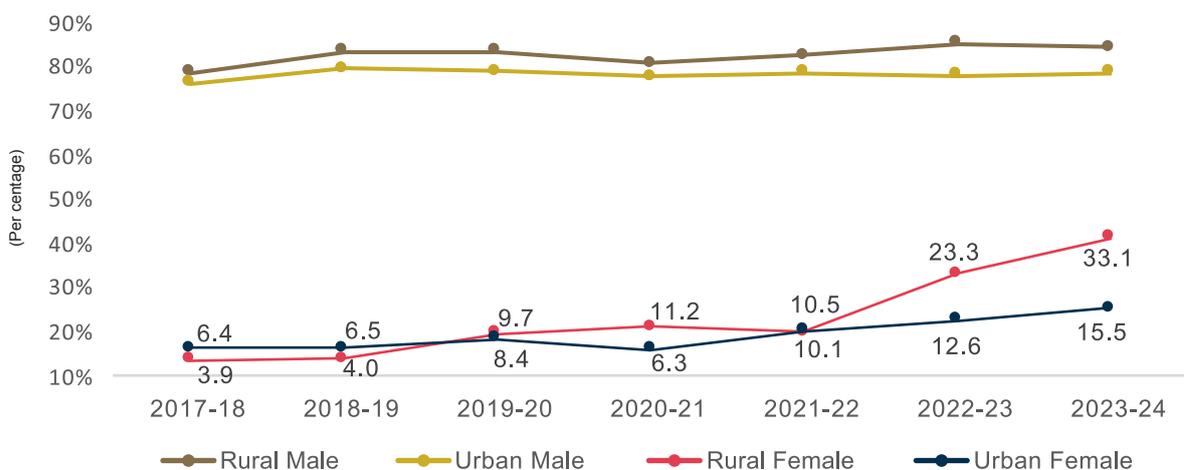
Introduction

Bihar, one of India's fastest-growing states with a 10.6 per cent real State Gross Domestic Product (SGDP) growth rate in 2022-23, has the nation's lowest female labour force participation rate (FLFPR), even though male LFPR remains high, widening the gender gap. Research suggests that effective policies to address this gap should prioritise women's access to education, training, entrepreneurship, childcare, eldercare, and flexible work arrangements¹. To address this multifaceted problem, the Bihar government has implemented several schemes to improve girls' access to quality education, including the Mukhyamantri Balika Cycle Yojna (bicycle scheme), Mukhyamantri Balika Poshak Yojna (uniform scheme), Mukhyamantri Akshar Aanchal Yojna (literacy initiative), and the Mukhyamantri Kanya Uthan Yojana (cash incentive-based scheme for higher education). Further initiatives, like the Mukhyamantri Kanya Suraksha Yojna, aim to prevent female foeticide and child marriage by providing financial support to girls and their families². These efforts have resulted in a significant rise in FLFPR in recent years, narrowing the gender gap. This fact sheet will examine the trends and characteristics of female employment in Bihar using data from the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS).

Trends in Female Labour Force Participation Rates

- Bihar has experienced the highest growth in FLFPR among all Indian states. Its FLFPR increased substantially from 4.11 per cent in 2017-18 to 30.5 per cent in 2023-24.
- This growth is primarily driven by rural women workers. While the rural FLFPR began increasing in 2018-19, it accelerated significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic year (2021-22), rising from 10.1 per cent to 31.3 per cent in 2023-24.
- In urban areas, FLFPR rose from 6.3 per cent in 2020-21 to 15.5 per cent in 2023-24. However, this growth is considerably slower than that seen in rural areas of the state.

Figure 1: Trend in LFPR from PLFS 2017-18 to 2023-24



*For ages 15 years and above

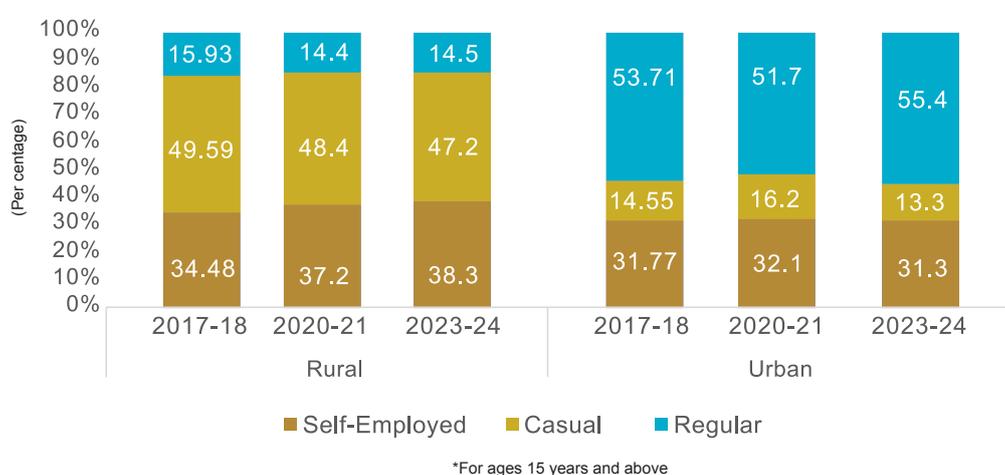
¹ <https://ijrpr.com/uploads/V4/ISSUE5/IJRPR13106.pdf>

² https://www.c3india.org/uploads/news/Sakshamaa_WEE_in_Bihar_Landscape_Report.pdf

Distribution of Women Workers by Status of Employment

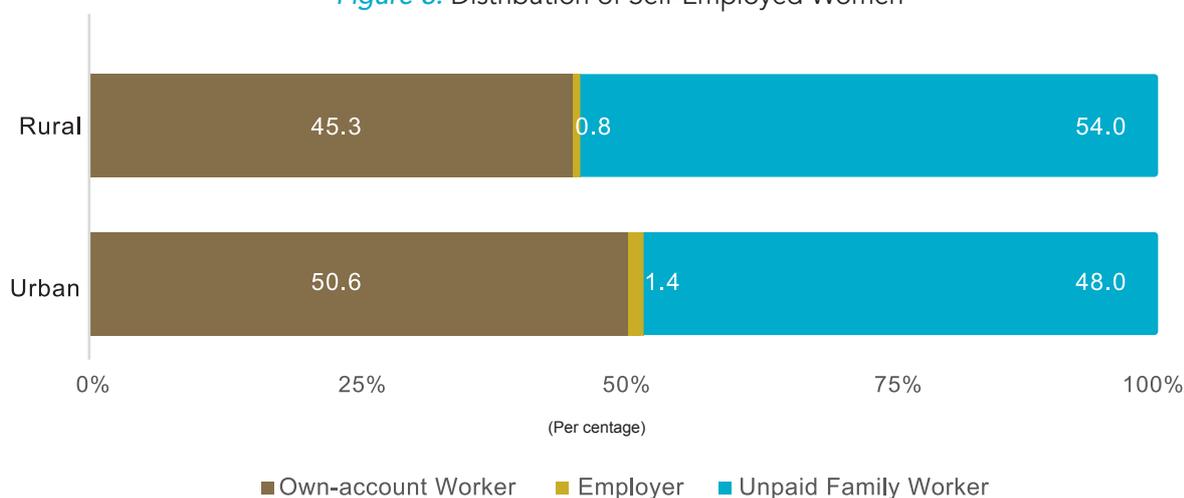
- In rural areas, the proportion of self-employed workers increased substantially from 35.2 per cent to 84.8 per cent between 2017-18 and 2023-24. Conversely, there has been a significant decline in regular salaried workers, from 27.9 per cent to just 3.6 per cent, over the same period. A similar trend is observed for casual workers, whose share has also decreased, from 36.9 per cent in 2017-18 to 11.6 per cent in 2023-24.
- Self-employment among urban women rose sharply, from 25.4 per cent in 2017-18 to 61 per cent in 2023-24, while casual employment declined. Regular salaried employment also decreased significantly, from 63.4 per cent to 25 per cent between 2017-18 and 2020-21, before recovering slightly to 30.3 per cent in 2023-24. Although the decline in regular and casual employment mirrors national trends, the decrease in regular salaried women is considerably much larger in this state.

Figure 2: Trend in Women Workforce across Type of Employment



- In rural Bihar, unpaid family work dominates among self-employed women, accounting for 54 per cent of the share, while the remaining 46 per cent are own-account workers, reflecting the all India picture.
- Among urban self-employed women, nearly 51 per cent are own-account workers, followed by 48 per cent who are unpaid family workers.

Figure 3: Distribution of Self-Employed Women

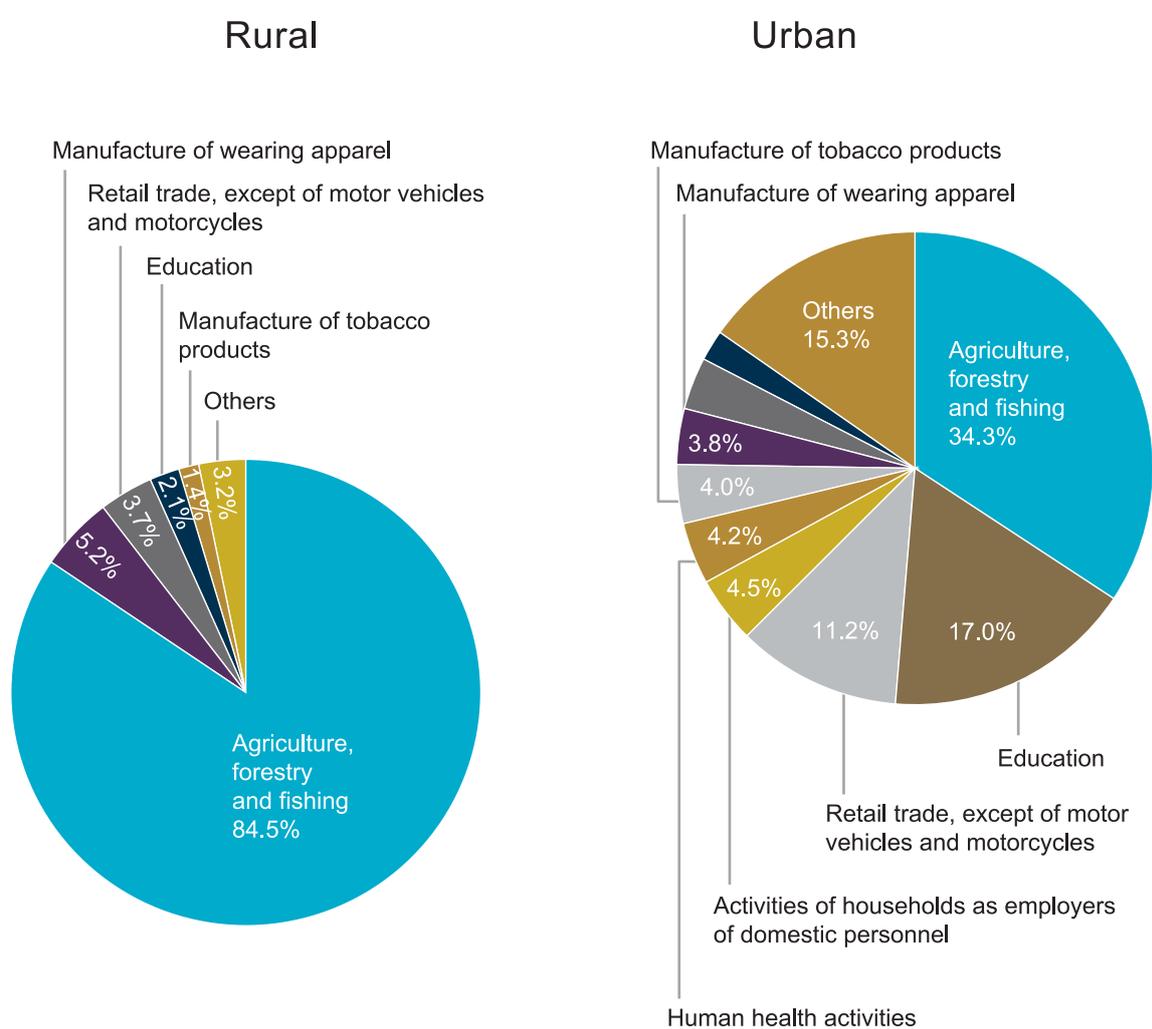


*For ages 15 years and above

Distribution of Women Workers by Broad Industry Divisions

- Reflecting the national trend, the sectoral distribution of women in rural Bihar shows that nearly 85 per cent are employed in agriculture and allied activities, followed by manufacturing of wearing apparel (5 per cent) and retail trade (4 per cent).
- In urban areas, 34 per cent of women are in agriculture, 17 per cent are in education and 11 per cent are in retail trade.

Figure 4: Distribution of Women Workforce by Broad Industry Divisions



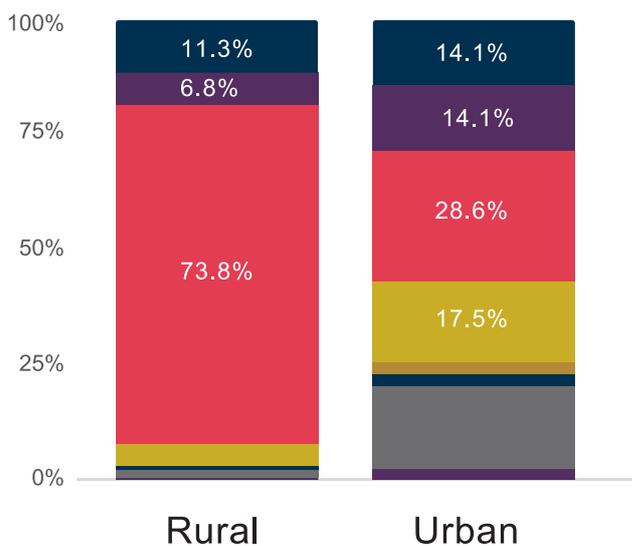
*For ages 15 years and above



Distribution of Women Workers by Occupation Types

- In the rural region of Bihar, more than 73 per cent of women are skilled agricultural and fishery workers, followed by 11 per cent as elementary occupations.
- In urban areas, skilled agricultural and fishery workers make up the largest share (28.6 per cent), followed by professionals (18 per cent), and then service and shop/market sales workers (17.5 per cent).

Figure 5: Occupational Classification of Women Workers



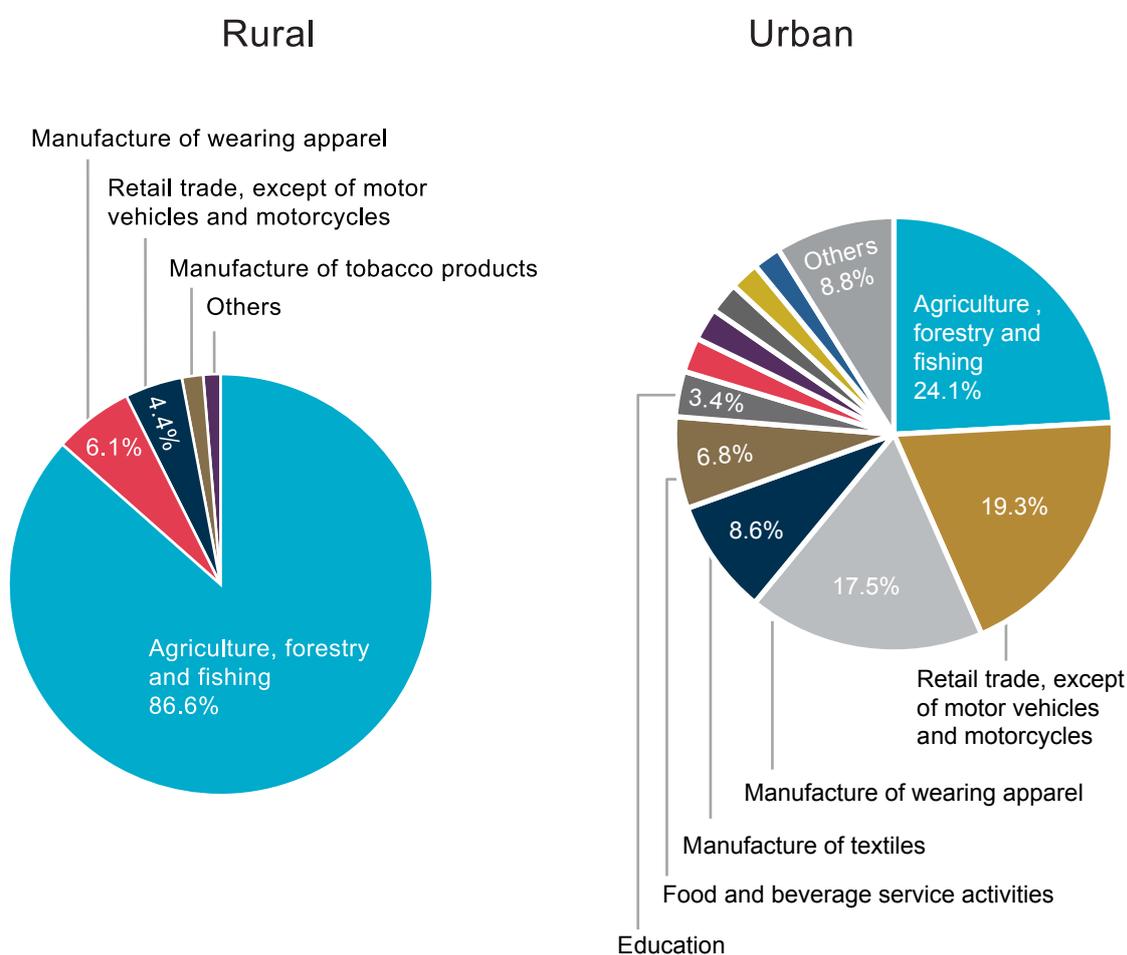
*For ages 15 years and above

- Legislators, Senior Officials and Managers
- Professionals
- Technicians and Associate Professionals
- Clerks
- Service Workers and Shop & Market Sales Workers
- Skilled Agricultural and Fishery Workers
- Craft and related Trades Workers
- Plant and Machine Operators and Assemblers
- Elementary Occupations

Distribution of Self-employed Women Workers by Broad Industry Types

- Among self-employed women in rural Bihar, over 86 per cent work in agriculture, followed by manufacturing of wearing apparel (6 per cent), mirroring the national trend.
- In urban areas, the agricultural and retail trade sectors dominate women's employment, accounting for 48 per cent and 18 per cent of the total self-employed women, respectively. Nationally, however, women's participation in agriculture is much lower (21 per cent), while retail trade and the manufacturing of wearing apparel each account for 19 per cent of self-employed women workers.

Figure 6: Distribution of Self-employed Women Workforce by Broad Industry Types



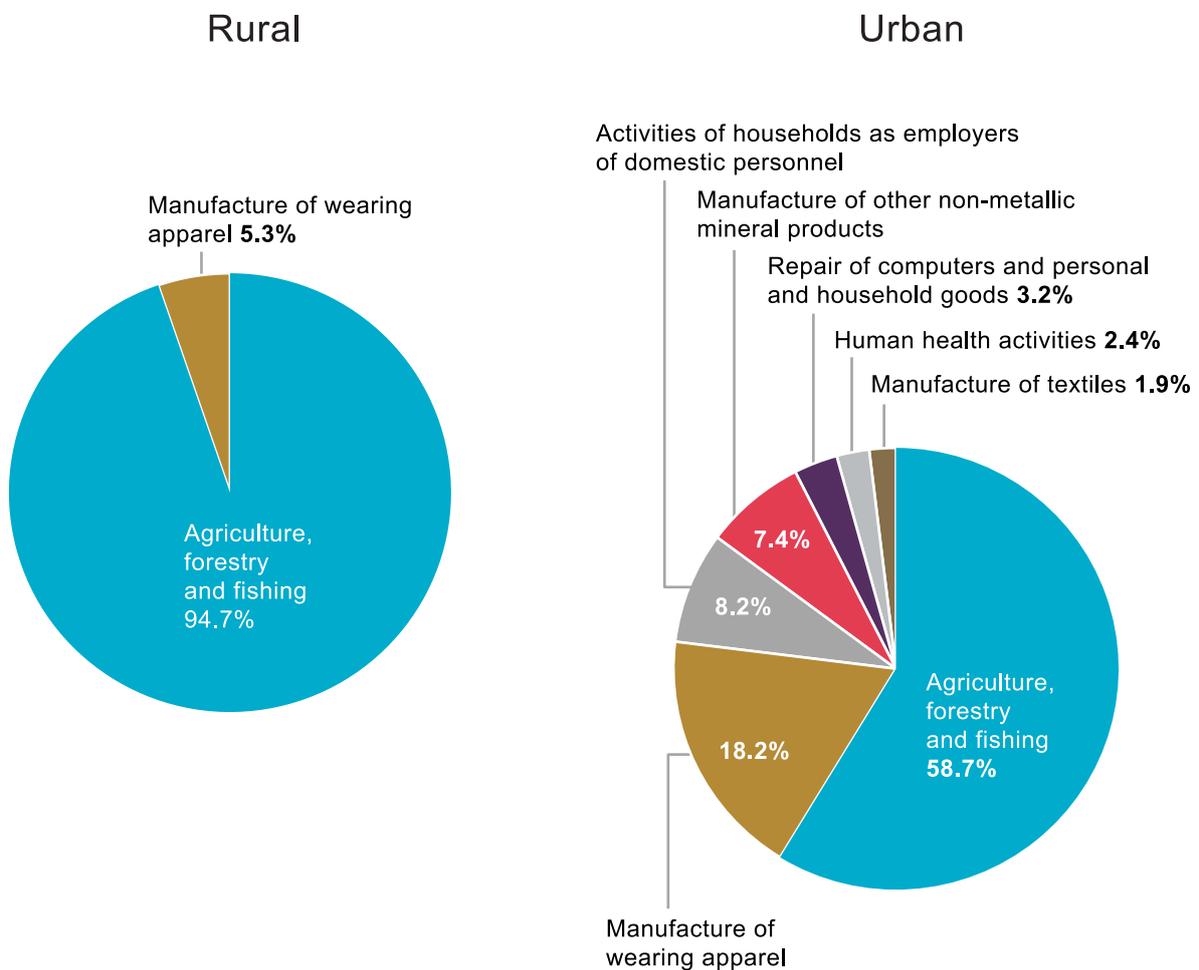
*For ages 15 years and above



Distribution of Casual Women Workers by Broad Industry Types

- In rural areas, 95 per cent of casual women are in agriculture and 5 per cent in manufacturing of wearing apparel.
- In the urban region, 58.7 per cent of the casual workers are in agriculture, followed by manufacturing of wearing apparel (18.2 per cent).
- Across India, the majority of women casual workers are employed in agriculture, in both rural and urban areas. Unlike Bihar, however, the second largest sector nationally for casual women workers is construction of buildings, accounting for 10 per cent of rural women and 27 per cent of urban women in this category.

Figure 7: Distribution of Casual Women Workforce by Broad Industry Types

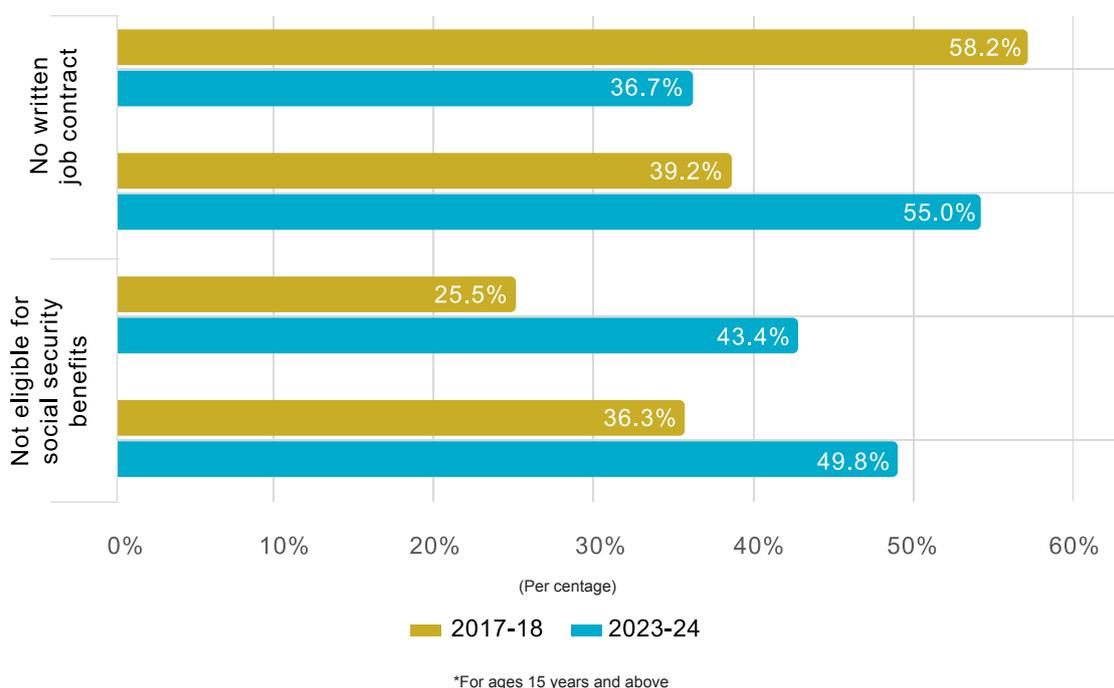


*For ages 15 years and above

Condition of Work in Regular Employment

- The proportion of women without social security benefits has increased over the past seven years. In rural Bihar, this share rose from 36.3 per cent in 2017-18 to 49.8 per cent in 2023-24. Urban areas saw a more significant increase, from 25.5 per cent to 43.4 per cent in the same period.
- Concerning job security, the proportion of regularly salaried women in rural areas without written job contracts has increased from 39 per cent in 2017-18 to 55 per cent in 2023-24, mirroring the national trend. Conversely, in urban areas, the proportion of women without job security has significantly decreased, from 58 per cent in 2017-18 to 37 per cent in 2023-24.

Figure 8: Job and Social Security Benefits over the Years

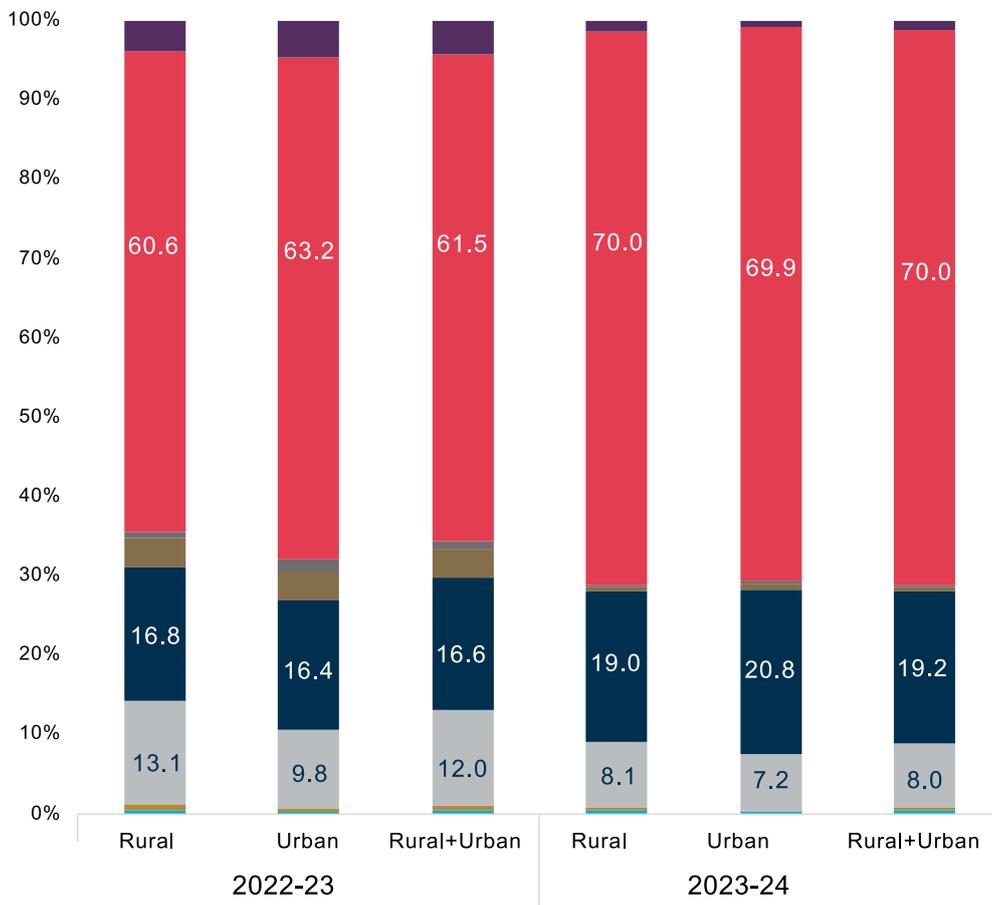


Reason for Not Being in the Labour Force

- In rural areas, the proportion of women citing childcare and domestic chores as the primary barrier to FLFP increased from 61 per cent to 70 per cent in just one year. This contrasts with the trend for rural women across India, where citing childcare and domestic chores as a reason for being out of the labour force has declined.
- Similarly, in urban areas, the proportion increased from 63 per cent to 70 per cent in one year. This is a much larger increase in women citing childcare and domestic chores as the reason hindering their labour market participation compared to the national average.



Figure 9: Reason for Not in the Labour Force



- Did not have the request train/qualification/age for work
- Health/age related reason
- Social reasons
- Child care/personal commitments in home making
- Non availability of work a convenient location
- Want to continue study
- Finacially well-off
- Others

Conclusion

Bihar, one of the Indian states with very low FLFPR, has had a notable increase in its labour force from 2021–2022 to 2023-24. Coupled with the reverse migration during the pandemic period and with certain policies of the state government the growth rate of FLFPR is quite high in post the pandemic years. Analogous to the national trend, the increase in rural self-employed women workers remains the main contributor behind the rise in the FLFPR. Bihar now accounts for approximately 7.25 per cent of all self-employed women in India (PLFS 2023-24), increasing from just 1 per cent in 2018-19. The double whammy of rising self-employed workers and the declining share of regular salaried women workers and the drastic reduction in their social and job security benefits suggest that women's labour market participation in Bihar is still less driven by opportunity. Moreover, the significant increase in childcare and housework as a primary barrier to women's labour force participation underscores the urgent need for improved childcare and eldercare infrastructure, flexible work arrangements, safer transportation and communication, and better household infrastructure to enable women's participation in the labour market.

The fact sheet is prepared by Aneek Chowdhury and reviewed by Bidisha Mondal, IWWAGE – An Initiative of LEAD at Krea University. Copyright @2025



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