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'More than half of Indian women remain outside labour force due to care duties': International Labour Organization report


India would need further investment in the care economy, particularly in the early childhood care and education (ECCE) to support labour force

participation of unpaid carers and gender equality in the workforce, the report said.

Written by [Aanchal Magazine](#)

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The report also showed that 97.8 per cent women and 91.4 per cent men in India are outside the labour force due to personal or family reasons. (Representational photo)

India has 53 per cent of women outside the labour force due to care responsibilities and needs further investment in the care economy, the International Labour Organization (ILO) said in its latest report 'The impact of care responsibilities of women's labour participation' released last week. India would need further investment in the care economy, particularly in the early childhood care and education (ECCE) to support labour force participation of unpaid carers and gender equality in the workforce, the report said.

In comparison, just around 1.1 per cent of men stay outside the labour force due to care responsibilities in India. The high proportion of women staying outside the labour force comes amid concerns over low female labour force participation rate in India, with most employed in unpaid household work.

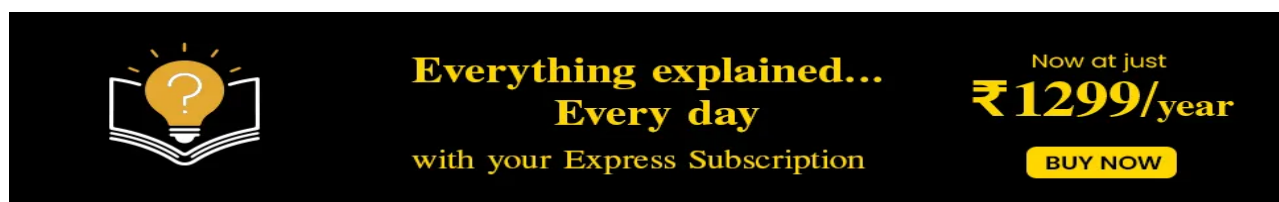
“Iran, Egypt, Jordan, Mali and India have more than 50 per cent of women outside the labour force due to care responsibilities and may need further investment in the care economy, particularly in ECCE. On the other hand, countries such as Belarus, Bulgaria, Latvia and Sweden have less than 10 per cent of women outside the labour force due to caregiving while investing around 1 per cent of GDP in ECCE,” the ILO report said.

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The report also showed that 97.8 per cent women and 91.4 per cent men in India are outside the labour force due to personal or family reasons.

According to the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) for 2023-24, 36.7 per cent of females and 19.4 per cent of the workforce in India is engaged in unpaid work in household enterprises as against 37.5 per cent females and 18.3 per cent of total workers in 2022-23.



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The earlier Time Use Survey 2019 by the National Statistical Office (NSO) had also shown the large proportion of women spending time over unpaid activities such as

domestic work and care responsibilities. As per the Survey, around 81 per cent of females aged 6 years and above spent over five hours daily on unpaid domestic services in India, with the share being higher for the age group 15-29 years at 85.1 per cent and 92 per cent for the age group 15-59 years. Within the 60+ age group, 78 per cent of women contribute to unpaid domestic services. In comparison, men spent just over one hour daily for unpaid domestic services with 24.5 per cent share (6 years and above), 22.5 per cent (15-29 years) and 27 per cent (15-59 years).

For caregiving, 26.2 per cent of females aged 6 years and above spent over two hours daily for unpaid caregiving services to household members, double that of 12.4 per cent for males in the same age group. The share was higher for the 15-29 years age bracket for females at 38.4 per cent and 31.2 per cent for 15-59 age group, while the same for males was 10.2 per cent and 14.3 per cent, respectively.

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According to the new ILO global estimates, which were released on Tuesday, globally, an estimated 708 million women are outside the labour force because of unpaid care responsibilities. In 2023, 748 million people (aged 15 years or older) were not participating in the global labour force because of care responsibilities, accounting for a third of all working-age persons outside of the labour force. Of these, 708 million were women and 40 million were men, the UN agency said.

Before this, the previous estimate by ILO for 2018 had found that 606 million women and 41 million men (a total of 647 million people worldwide) were not participating in the labour force due to care responsibilities. The UN agency said that although the new estimates are not comparable due to methodology changes,

they show that care responsibilities continue to be the main reason women are not looking or not available for employment.

Care responsibilities present the main barrier to women entering and staying in the labour force, while men are more likely to cite other personal reasons for being outside the labour force, such as education and health issues.

This shows the disproportionate role of women in child-rearing and care along with housekeeping and other care responsibilities. Women with lower education and those in rural areas face a higher barrier to workforce participation, it said.

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“Women shoulder a disproportionate share of care responsibilities, preventing their participation in the labour force due to factors such as low education levels, limited job opportunities, poor infrastructure, rural residence, and inadequate care and support systems. Additionally, societal expectations and norms around caregiving further restrict women’s labour market inclusion, and deepen gender inequalities,” Sukti Dasgupta, Director of the Conditions of Work and Equality Department, ILO, said.



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Region wise data shows that the highest percentage of women outside the labour force citing care responsibilities as the reason was in Northern Africa (63 per cent), while eastern Europe had the lowest rate globally (11 per cent). In the second spot were the Arab states (59 per cent), followed by Asia and the Pacific (52 per cent). In the Americas, the variation is stark, with 47 per cent citing care as the main reason for being outside the labour force in Latin America and the Caribbean as against 19 per cent in Northern America. In Europe and Central Asia, 21 per cent of women report caregiving as the main barrier to enter the workforce, the report said.

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Aanchal Magazine

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Aanchal Magazine is Senior Assistant Editor with The Indian Express and reports on the macro economy and fiscal policy, with a special focus on economic science, la **... Read More**

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