

Media Coverage

Publication	Date	Edition	Headline	Size
Mint	27 Oct 2020	Mumbai	Women's Workforce Participation Drop	480

Skewed record

The share of women in new payroll additions fell below 20% in August, part of a gradual decline in the past few months, government data showed.

Month	2019-20	2020-21
June	25.1	21.11
July	24.52	20.49
August	22.76	19.98

Source: Govt payroll data

SARVESH KUMAR SHARMA/MINT

Women's workforce participation drops

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Women's share in new payroll additions fell below the 20% mark in August, part of a gradual decline in female participation in formal work over the past few months, according to government data.

The latest monthly data showed a sharp decline from 2019-20 when women's participation in formal work was almost 23%. The reasons, according to industry experts and economists, include a general dearth of jobs, discrimination against women in a patriarchal society, the lack of a family support system in an environment marked by quarantined living conditions, and employers aiming to reduce the cost of employees by increasing working hours.

According to payroll data collected from the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO), 669,914 people joined the formal workforce in August, and only 133,872 of them, or just 19.98%, were females—down marginally from 20.49% in July and 21.11% in June.

In the year-ago months, the percentage of women in fresh payroll additions was 22.76% in August, and 24.52% in July.

To be sure, the formal sector job creation in India has been lagging for quite some time and more prominently, post the coronavirus outbreak.

"The low female payroll additions as a percentage of total additions in the last few

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Return of women to workspaces slows

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months is a worrying sign. If you look back at 2019-20, then you realize how the current pandemic and business loss have impacted women more," said a government official who declined to be named.

The data backs a warning by the International Labour Organization (ILO) that the pandemic will widen labour market inequalities, and countries may lose some gains made in previous years on women's work participation rate.

There are three main factors suppressing women's participation in the pandemic, said R.R. Shyam Sundar, a labour economist and professor at XLRI Jamshedpur.

"First, because of discrimination by the patriarchal structure of our society, the pandemic has increased the work pressure on women. Second, in a pandemic environment, risk-averse employers in

ILO has warned the pandemic will widen labour market inequalities. RAMESH PATHAK/AMT

manufacturing are preferring male workers as they are able to put in extra hours of work," said Shyam Sundar.

"And third, the cost to the company for women workers, mainly frontline staff of manufacturing sectors, has gone up because of the need for transport, giving statutory maternity benefit in a subdued business environment, and the general safety precautions for women workers," said Sundar.

However, he added that women's participation in information technology jobs and the overall internet-driven knowledge work should have gone up, unlike in manufacturing and hospital-ry.

R.P. Yadav, chairman and managing director of Genius Consultants Ltd, a leading human resource and staffing company, was more forthcoming.

"The general job environment is slowly improving as lockdown has eased, and the festive season has kicked in. But women's participation is still very low. In the organized employment space, women in early and up-to mid-career stage form the bulk of the women workforce, and this is where the

participation is very low in recent months, and more so in factories," said Yadav.

"We have seen young women who have children are hesitating to join work because of the fear of infection, and this is creating a divide—life or job? This is where they are falling behind. Second, the work of a woman has gone up significantly post the covid-19 outbreak in India. The household work and online schooling in the absence of physical schools have kept mothers occupied. Lastly, with the above two reasons keeping them occupied, if a company is insisting on work from an office, they are either quitting or not joining fresh work," said Yadav, who is also a board member of the Indian Staffing Federation, an umbrella body of staffing companies.

Household work and online schooling in the absence of schools have kept mothers occupied, say analysts