

immersion INDIA®

FIELD NOTES · SHEET 14

India's Missing Workforce

The Growth Story Still Waiting to Be Written

WOMEN & WORK · NATIONWIDE · URBAN AND RURAL

An engineering floor in Bengaluru. This is the visible end of female participation; most of the measured rise happened somewhere else.

41.7%
female participation rate
up from 23.3% in 2017–18

~25%
urban female participation
far below the rural figure

363 min
unpaid care work daily
women; men spend 123 minutes

55%
the 2050 target
Economic Survey 2025–26

> India produces more women college graduates in absolute numbers than the United States or the United Kingdom. Walk into most Indian workplaces and they are strikingly absent from the room.

Female labour force participation reached 41.7% in 2023–24, up sharply from 23.3% in 2017–18. The Economic Survey treats lifting it toward 55% by 2050 as a growth lever on par with any industrial policy.

The asterisk matters: much of the rise is distress-driven, in rural unpaid farm work. The Time Use Survey explains the ceiling — 363 minutes a day of unpaid care work for women against 123 for men.

THE SIGNAL TO WATCH Urban participation, stuck near 25%. Gains there mean the structural barriers are falling.

Make India your classroom

A field guide for global executive education. Turn over for the site visits, the questions for the room and what we run.

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BENGALURU, KARNATAKA, INDIA

FIELD NOTES · SHEET 14 · WOMEN & WORK

Bring the cohort to the case.

Every sheet in this series is a place you can stand in. The dark store, the fab, the swap kiosk, the mandi, the GCC floor — all of them within a day of Bengaluru, and all of them take visitors.

Field Notes is a series on the forces shaping India now, designed to give decision-makers exploring India the right perspective before they commit to it. Each one takes a single force, gives you the argument and the four numbers that anchor it, and names the places in India where you can go and stand in front of it. The series is drawn from *The India That Is Unique*, Immersion India's field guide for global executive education.

ON THE GROUND — WOMEN & WORK

An engineering floor in Bengaluru
The visible end, and the least representative.

An anganwadi
Childcare as infrastructure, and the cost of its absence.

A women's shift on a factory line
Transport, hours and safety as the real constraints.

THREE QUESTIONS FOR THE ROOM

01 Participation rose sharply, but largely into unpaid or subsidiary rural agricultural work. What indicator would distinguish opportunity from distress?

02 Thirty-one percent of women cite the commute itself as the barrier. Which is the higher-return intervention: workplace policy, childcare, or transport?

03 Women are 28% of India's platform workforce and rising, inside a labour framework built for traditional employment. Who should close that gap?

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