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Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) Annual Report 2025

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Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) Annual Report 2025


PIB Special Features Chapter 1 · 3 min read ·

WHY IN NEWS

The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) released the PLFS Annual Report 2025, revealing India's Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) at 59.3% — with significant gender and sector disparities that define India's employment challenge heading into the Viksit Bharat 2047 vision.

WHAT IS THE PERIODIC LABOUR FORCE SURVEY (PLFS)?

The PLFS was launched in **April 2017** by MoSPI to replace the older National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) Employment-Unemployment Survey (EUS). Its key upgrade is **quarterly urban + annual rural** data collection, enabling near-real-time labour market tracking.

FEATURE	NSSO EUS (OLD)	PLFS (CURRENT)
Launched	1972	2017
Frequency	5-yearly	Quarterly (urban) + Annual
Sample size	~1 lakh HHs	~1.02 lakh HHs
Coverage	National	National (urban Q, rural annual)
Key improvement	Infrequent	Near real-time tracking

KEY METRICS — PLFS 2025

INDICATOR	OVERALL	MALE	FEMALE
LFPR (Labour Force Participation Rate)	59.3%	79.1%	40.0%
WPR (Worker Population Ratio)	57.4%	—	—
Unemployment Rate	3.1%	—	—
Urban Male Unemployment	—	5.1%	—
Urban Female Unemployment	—	—	8.6%

Key Definitions

- **LFPR:** Percentage of population (aged 15+) that is either employed or actively seeking work.
- **WPR:** Percentage of population that is actually employed (working).
- **Unemployment Rate:** LFPR minus WPR, expressed as share of labour force.

EMPLOYMENT STRUCTURE — SECTORAL BREAKDOWN

EMPLOYMENT TYPE	SHARE (2025)	TREND
Self-employment	56.2%	Dominant; includes own-account workers, helpers in household enterprises
Regular salaried	23.6%	Rose from ~21% in 2018 — positive formalization signal
Casual labour	~20.2%	Declining but still significant in construction and agriculture

Agriculture's Declining but Dominant Share

YEAR	AGRICULTURE EMPLOYMENT SHARE
~2000	60%+
2017–18	~48%
2025	43.0%

The structural shift out of agriculture toward services is underway, but it is **slow and uneven** — many workers are moving into low-productivity informal services rather than formal manufacturing.

GENDER GAP IN LABOUR PARTICIPATION

India's **female LFPR of 40.0%** against **male LFPR of 79.1%** represents a **39.1 percentage point gap** — one of the widest gender labour participation gaps among G20 nations.

Reasons for low female LFPR:

- Social norms limiting women's workforce participation (care economy burden)
- Limited availability of safe, well-paying formal jobs near home
- Low returns to female education in rural non-farm economy
- Marriage and fertility effects: many women exit labour force post-marriage

Signs of improvement:

- Female LFPR has risen from ~23% in 2017–18 — a significant structural shift
- Rural female LFPR rising faster than urban, partly driven by PM-KISAN + SHG linkages

THE JOBLESS GROWTH PARADOX

India's GDP has grown at 6–8% annually, yet **formal employment creation has lagged**:

- High GDP growth driven by capital-intensive sectors (IT, finance, infrastructure)
- Labour-intensive manufacturing (textiles, leather, food processing) growing slowly
- Gig economy absorbs workers but without social security or formal contracts

PLFS vs CMIE Data Debate

ASPECT	PLFS (MOSPI)	CMIE (CENTRE FOR MONITORING INDIAN ECONOMY)
Nature	Government official survey	Private real-time panel data
Coverage	Rural + Urban	Primarily urban
Unemployment figure	3.1%	Often 7–9% (current)
Criticism of PLFS	Underestimates unemployment by counting self-employed	May overestimate due to sampling bias

Economists argue both datasets capture different dimensions — PLFS tracks structural employment; CMIE tracks current labour market churn.

UPSC ANGLE

- **GS3 — Indian Economy:** Employment data interpretation, structural transformation of the economy, informal sector dominance, jobless growth debate.
- **GS1 — Society:** Gender gap in workforce, women's labour participation, care economy.
- **GS2 — Governance:** Role of MoSPI, data governance, PLFS vs CMIE reliability debate.
- **Essay:** "India's demographic dividend can only be realised through quality employment, not just GDP growth."

Prelims-ready facts:

- PLFS launched: 2017 by MoSPI
- Replaced: NSSO Employment-Unemployment Survey
- LFPR 2025: 59.3%; Female LFPR: 40.0%
- Unemployment Rate: 3.1%
- Regular salaried workers: 23.6%
- Agriculture share of employment: 43%

FACTS CORNER

PLFS launched: April 2017 by MoSPI (replaces NSSO EUS)

LFPR (2025): 59.3% overall | Male: 79.1% | Female: 40.0%

WPR: 57.4% | Unemployment Rate: 3.1%

Urban unemployment: Male 5.1%, Female 8.6%

Self-employment: 56.2% of workforce (dominant category)

Regular salaried: 23.6% (up from ~21% in 2018)

Agriculture share: 43.0% (down from 60%+ in 2000)

Gender gap: Female LFPR is 39.1 percentage points below male LFPR — one of the widest in G20

Gig workers: Not adequately captured in PLFS methodology

CMIE vs PLFS: Private vs official data — ongoing debate on India's true unemployment rate



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