



Beyond Barriers: The path to improving women's workforce participation in India

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1. Executive summary	5
<i>We highlight the need to focus on entry-level jobs to improve women's workforce participation, current challenges inhibiting progress, and how to address them.</i>	
2. Introduction	6
<i>We look at the status of women's participation in the workforce, key opportunity areas, and progress made thus far.</i>	
3. The case for boosting women's workforce participation	10
<i>We share the business, economic, and social benefits of gender diversity, drawn from data and industry experience.</i>	
4. Barriers hindering progress	12
<i>We look at company and ecosystem-level challenges that limit women's access to, and retention in entry-level roles.</i>	
5. The way forward	18
<i>We share insights for companies and ecosystem stakeholders to drive sustained improvement in women's workforce participation.</i>	
6. Annexure	23
<i>I. Sequenced interventions for companies</i>	
	23
<i>II. Urban women's willingness to work</i>	
	24
<i>III. Case studies: Creating inclusive workplaces</i>	
	25
<i>IV. Case studies: Building gender-responsive public infrastructure</i>	
	27
<i>V. Case studies: Shifting norms and mindsets</i>	
	28
<i>VI. Case studies: Improving women talent pipelines</i>	
	29
7. Glossary of terms	30



1. Executive summary¹

Viksit Bharat, or a developed India, counts on women joining and remaining in the workforce at scale, with the government setting a target of 70% participation by 2047.² Change is underway and women's participation has risen from 33.9% in 2022 to 40% in 2025. However, the gains have been largely limited to rural India. Urban women's participation has improved only marginally — from 24.7% to 27.7% — over the same period. Further, the share of urban working women in regular wage/ salaried jobs, which offer higher wages and greater job security compared to self-employment or casual work, has stagnated at 50-51%. The reality is that women want to work. Yet, they remain under-represented in most large, growing industries (e.g., manufacturing, retail, hospitality). Hence, boosting women's participation in formal, entry-level jobs in these industries is a key lever to achieving the 2047 participation target.

This document examines why women's participation remains low in formal, entry-level jobs and what stakeholders can do to change this. It draws on FSG's primary research³ and its experience supporting 20+ companies on their gender diversity journeys, and the industry and ecosystem expertise of its co-authors. The intention is to provide a broad set of insights for companies and ecosystem actors (e.g., governments, funders) to drive sustained improvement in women's workforce participation across sectors and geographies.

Women's workforce participation delivers business, economic, and social value. Companies that employ more women report gains in productivity, customer experience, workforce stability, and attendance. At the economy level too, the gains are large. The World Bank estimates that raising women's labour force participation to 50% could contribute to the addition of one percentage point to India's annual GDP growth rate.⁴ The benefits also extend to society through greater economic empowerment of women and increased investments in children's education.

Despite these benefits, the gap in women's participation persists due to barriers at two levels: the company and the ecosystem. Company barriers include physical infrastructure that does not address women's needs, processes and systems that remain male-centric, and workplace culture and norms that allow gender biases to persist and do not treat diversity as a business imperative. Ecosystem barriers include inadequate public goods that constrain women's ability to access and hold jobs, regulations that limit or increase the cost of employing women, social norms that restrict women's access to jobs, assets, and skills, and talent supply constraints that limit the range of job roles available to women.

Boosting women's participation at scale requires coordinated action across multiple stakeholders. Companies need to rewire their workplaces through a gender lens so that women can access jobs, feel safe and supported, and succeed in them. This involves investing in women-friendly infrastructure, redesigning hiring and people processes, and fostering a respectful, equitable, and supportive work environment. At the same time, change needs to happen across the broader ecosystem too. Governments, funders, and civil society organisations need to work together to strengthen gender-responsive public infrastructure, expand women's access to non-traditional skilling, reform and operationalise conducive regulations, generate evidence on the business benefits of employing women, and shift social norms around women's work. Together, these complementary actions can create an enabling environment that allows millions more women to enter, remain, and progress in the workforce.

Change at scale will take time, but individual action need not wait.

"Start where you are. Use what you have. Do what you can."

— **Athur Ashe**

¹ All workforce participation figures are from PLFS 2025 for the 15+ age group, unless mentioned otherwise

² Press Information Bureau, Government of India (2025)

³ Survey of 6,600+ women from low-income households across 16 cities in 14 states

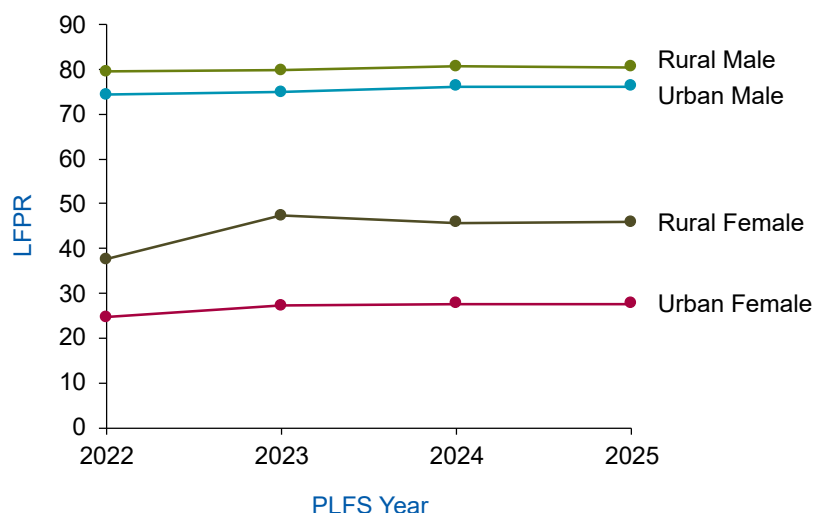
⁴ World Bank, "India Country Economic Memorandum 2024"

2. Introduction⁵

India has placed women's economic empowerment at the centre of its national ambition. Viksit Bharat, or a developed India, counts on women joining and remaining in the workforce at scale, with the government setting a target of 70% participation by 2047.⁶ Women's labour force participation has risen from 33.9% in 2022 to 40% in 2025.⁷ However, the increase has been largely limited to rural India. Despite women in urban India wanting to be in jobs,⁸ their access to formal, paid employment in large and growing industries remains low. The rest of this section unpacks women's labour force participation trends and opportunity areas.

The contrast between rural and urban women's participation rates is stark. Between 2022 and 2025, urban women's participation rose from 24.7% to 27.7%, while rural women's rose from 37.5% to 45.9%. The rural gain was substantially larger, and from a much higher base. Rural India added around 31 million women to the labour force over these three years, against roughly 9 million in urban areas. Urban women farthest from the labour force are those with a secondary or higher secondary education. Their participation rates of 17.4% and 17.7% are below even that of non-literate women (28.4%), with the rate rising sharply for diploma holders (48.0%) and graduates (36.4%).⁹

Chart 1. Labour force participation rates (LFPR) by categories¹⁰



Women's participation is not only low but disproportionately concentrated in self-employment and casual labour. ~91% of women in rural areas and ~49% in urban areas are either self-employed or in casual jobs.¹¹ These jobs rarely pay a predictable wage and typically don't offer a written contract, job security, paid leave, or maternity benefits. They also pay far less. In 2025, urban women in regular wage jobs earned ~INR 21,700 a month, more than double the ~INR 10,200 earned by self-employed urban women, with the gap even wider for rural women (~INR 13,200 against ~INR 5,500).¹² The more secure alternative has barely moved. Between 2022 and 2025, the share of urban women workers in regular wage jobs stagnated at 50–51%, and rural women's rose only slightly, from 8.1% to 9.3%.¹³

⁵ Unless otherwise stated, all figures and trends are drawn from Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) data for the 15+ age group

⁶ Press Information Bureau, Government of India (2025). Available at: <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2160547®=48&lang=2>

⁷ PLFS Annual Report 2025

⁸ 1 in 2 women in urban India are either working in a job or are seeking one; FSG's research with 6,600+ women. Available at: https://www.fsg.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Creating-a-Gender-Equitable-Workforce-in-India_vF.pdf

⁹ PLFS Annual Report 2025

¹⁰ PLFS Annual Reports

¹¹ PLFS Annual Report 2025

¹² PLFS Annual Report 2025: Figures not strictly comparable as regular wage figures are average monthly earnings; self-employment figures are average gross earnings over the last 30 days, excluding zero and non-reported earnings

¹³ PLFS Annual Report 2025

Chart 2. Trends in women's employment status, for rural and urban¹⁴

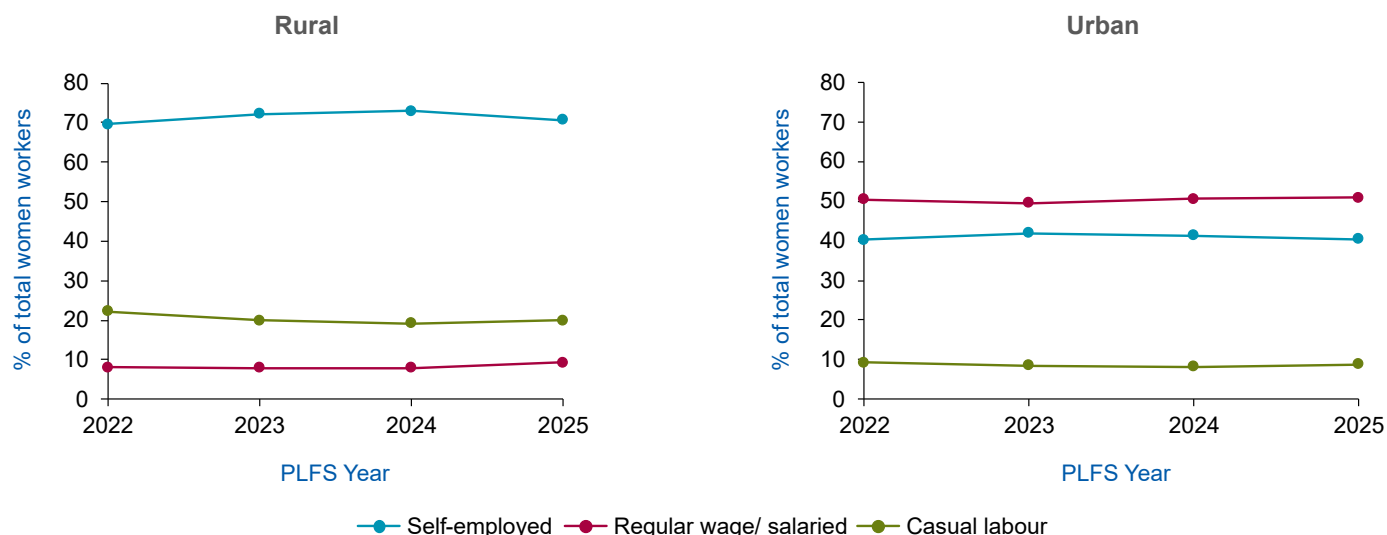
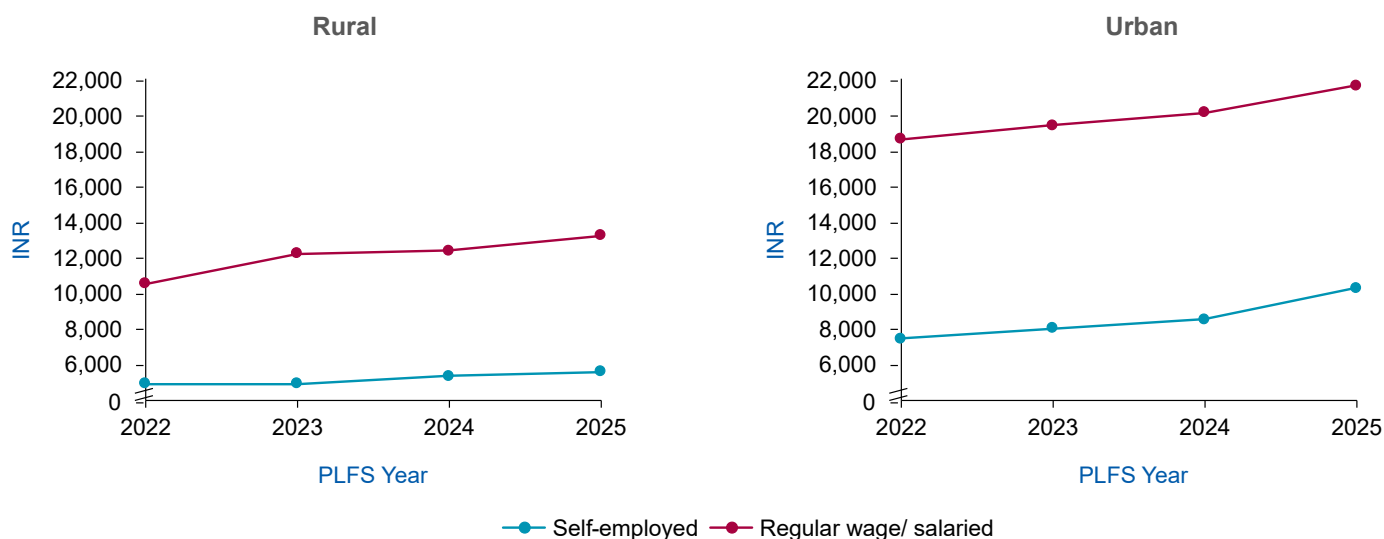


Chart 3. Average earnings of women by employment type, for rural and urban¹⁵

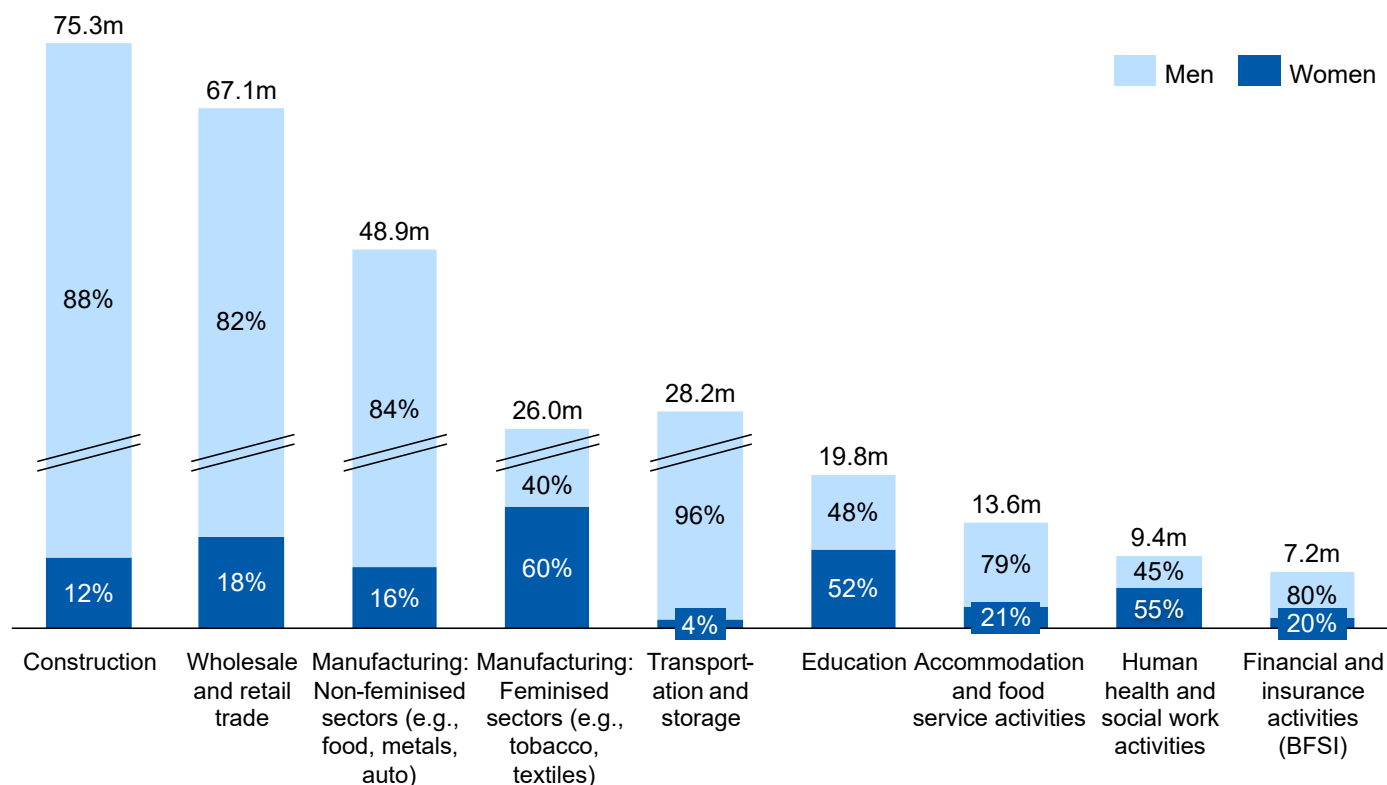


Women also remain concentrated in a narrow set of industries. Agriculture alone accounts for ~60% of all women workers (~73% of rural and ~13% of urban women). Beyond agriculture, women in the workforce remain concentrated in industries such as education, healthcare, employment in households, and specific manufacturing sub-sectors (e.g., wearing apparel, textile, tobacco). They remain under-represented in most large, high-growth industries (See Chart 4).

¹⁴ PLFS annual reports

¹⁵ PLFS Annual Report 2025: Figures not strictly comparable as regular wage figures are average monthly earnings; self-employment figures are average gross earnings over the last 30 days, excluding zero and non-reported earnings

Chart 4. Share of men and women workers (%) in large industries and total number of workers¹⁶



The clearest path to improving women's workforce participation lies in formal, entry-level jobs in large and growing industries. Retail, accommodation and food services, BFSI,¹⁷ several manufacturing sub-sectors (e.g., food, metals, auto), construction, and transportation and storage together employ close to 240 million people, yet women hold only ~14% of these jobs.¹⁸ Even a modest increase in gender diversity would add millions of women to the workforce, helping the country in its pursuit of the 70% women's workforce participation goal. Contrary to popular belief, women want these jobs. FSG interviewed 6,600+ women from low-income households¹⁹ in 16 cities across 14 states in India and found that 1 in 2 women in urban India are either working or seeking work. Among women who want to work, nearly 2 in 3 preferred a salaried job over self-employment (refer to Annexure 2). Therefore, efforts should concentrate where jobs are plentiful, women's needs are met, and women are under-represented.

¹⁶ PLFS Annual Report 2025. Data includes all employment types: Self-employment, Regular wage/ salary, Casual

¹⁷ BFSI: Banking, Financial Services, and Insurance

¹⁸ PLFS Annual Report 2025. Data includes all employment types: Self-employment, Regular wage/ salary, Casual

¹⁹ Households having an average monthly household income of INR 18,000 and below, in 2021-22

The encouraging news is that change is already underway. Employers are increasingly signalling intent, with 78% planning to hire more women into entry-level roles in 2025, up 5 percentage points from the previous year.²⁰ Some industries are witnessing a significant jump in women's participation. For example, the number of women in warehousing and last-mile delivery nearly doubled, from ~56,000 in 2021 to ~104,000 in 2024.²¹ In Food and Beverage (F&B) service roles, gender diversity has increased by 4 percentage points, from 17% to 21% between 2018 and 2024.²²

Ecosystem barriers are easing too. The government is easing regulations that restrict women in night shifts (as per the four new labour codes²³), enabling set-up of working women's hostels, expanding Anganwadi-cum-crèches through the Palna scheme, augmenting urban bus fleets, and running bus subsidy schemes for women.

Sustaining this momentum, and reaching the 70% women's participation target, however, requires collective commitment from employers and the larger ecosystem. The following section presents the case for the same.



20 Indeed survey, as reported in The Economic Times, "78% Indian employers plan to hire more women in blue-collar jobs this year" (2025). Available at: <https://hr.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/workplace-4-0/diversity-and-inclusion/78-indian-employers-plan-to-hire-more-women-in-blue-collar-jobs-this-year/118976205>

21 PLFS Annual Reports. FSG's estimate based on figures for warehousing and storage, courier activities, and internet retail (corresponding to e-commerce). This includes all employment types: Self-employment, Regular wage/ salary, Casual

22 PLFS Annual Reports. This includes all types of employees: Self-employment, Regular wage/ salary, Casual

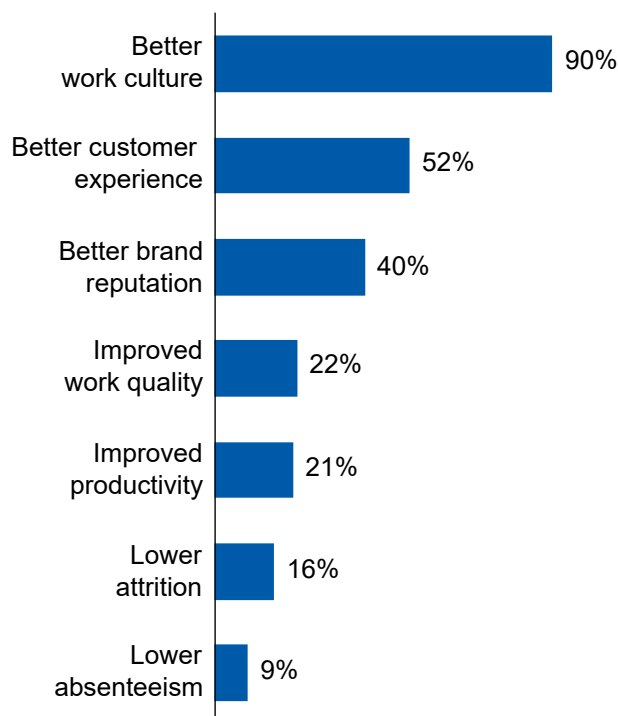
23 Ministry of Labour and Employment, "New Labour Code for New India." Available at: <https://www.labour.gov.in/static/uploads/2025/07/e6e2df267f39a63f0061041ab0a07db4.pdf>

3. The case for boosting women's workforce participation

Hiring women delivers value on three fronts — for business, for the economy, and for society.

Women deliver business value across multiple dimensions. Employers who hire women in entry-level roles report gains in productivity, workforce stability, workplace culture, and brand value.²⁴

Chart 5. Top benefits of workplace gender diversity as cited by managers (n = 58)²⁵



"Women are more target-oriented and complete the same task in less time."

– HR head, Electronics components manufacturing firm

"Women field agents are able to bring more women customers because of relatability and comfort."

– Insurance Broker

"Attrition of the blue-collar women workforce is 40% less than that of men."

– CEO, Flexi-staffing company

These reported benefits translate into measurable cost savings and revenue gains for employers. For instance, in warehousing, employing women reduces per-worker cost by ~3.6%,²⁶ though men and women are paid the same. The savings primarily come from women's lower attrition, lower absenteeism, and fewer customer complaints (See Chart 6). Similarly, in dark stores, women's higher productivity, attendance, and order quality results in a 11.83% reduction in per-worker cost, compared to men, for every woman added in the dark store.²⁷

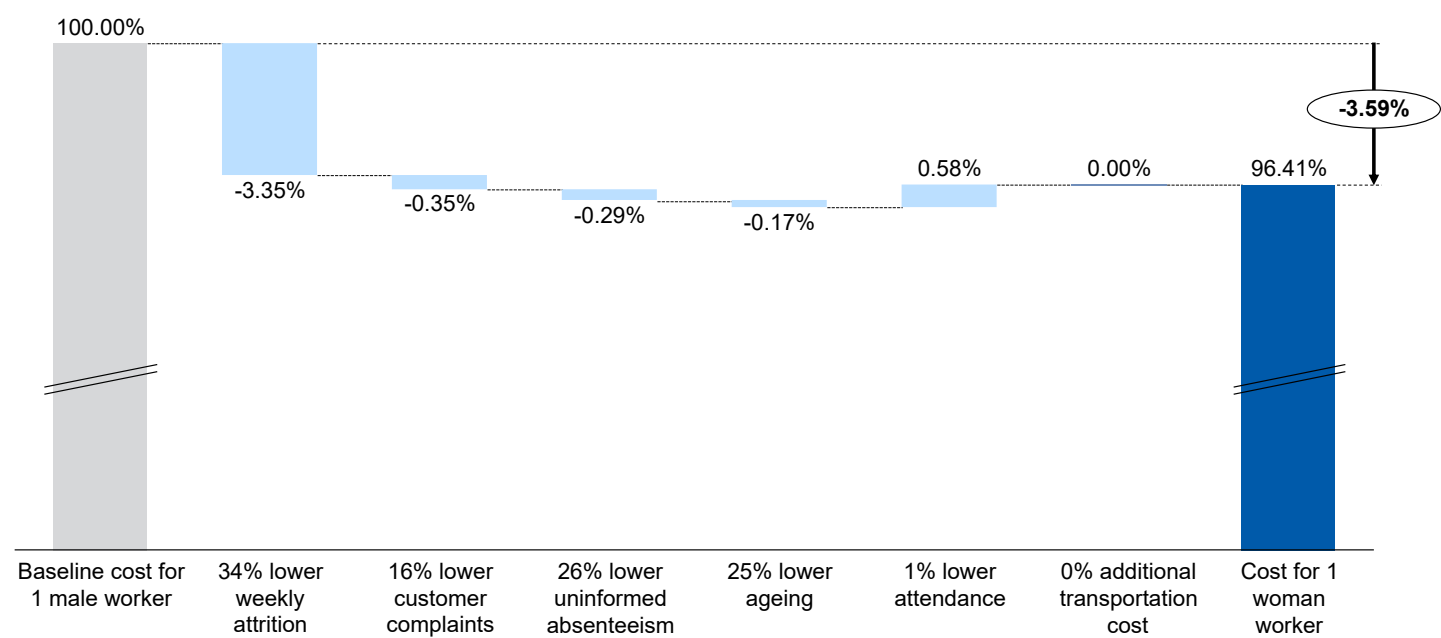
24 FSG's secondary research, pilots with 20+ companies, and interactions with 200+ CXOs, managers, and recruiters

25 FSG's digital survey on 'What are your industry peers doing to diversify the talent pool?' N=58 with 8 responses from BFSI, 21 responses from F&B services, 14 responses from retail and 15 responses from other industries (including manufacturing). In addition, ~5% respondents cited other benefits such as diverse perspectives

26 FSG; The ROI of Gender Diversity: Women Driving Business Success in Blue-Collar Roles (2024). Available at: https://www.fsg.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/The-ROI-of-Gender-Diversity_November-2024.pdf

27 FSG; The ROI of Gender Diversity: Women Driving Business Success in Blue-Collar Roles (2024). Available at: https://www.fsg.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/The-ROI-of-Gender-Diversity_November-2024.pdf

Chart 6. Cost savings from employing women in warehousing roles, despite equal wages²⁸



Beyond the business, the gains extend to society and the economy. Work gives women agency, choice, and freedom related to desired fertility and family size.²⁹ Families see greater investment in development areas like children’s education, with women spending ~42% of salary on household expenditure compared to ~28% by men.³⁰ Society benefits from having women role models, which encourages more women to seek employment.³¹ For the economy, the World Bank estimates that lifting women’s participation in the labour force to 50 percent could be the best way for India to increase its annual GDP growth rate by 1 percentage point and get closer to the 8 percent growth that it needs to become a high-income country by 2047.³²

Despite evidence that women deliver measurable value, their participation remains low due to multiple barriers. The next section examines these barriers in detail.

28 FSG; The ROI of Gender Diversity: Women Driving Business Success in Blue-Collar Roles (2024). Available at: https://www.fsg.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/The-ROI-of-Gender-Diversity_November-2024.pdf

29 Sivasankaran, “Work and Women’s Marriage, Fertility and Empowerment: Evidence from Textile Mill Employment in India” (2014)

30 SheThePeople, “Women spend larger part of salary on household than men: Survey” (23 February 2019)

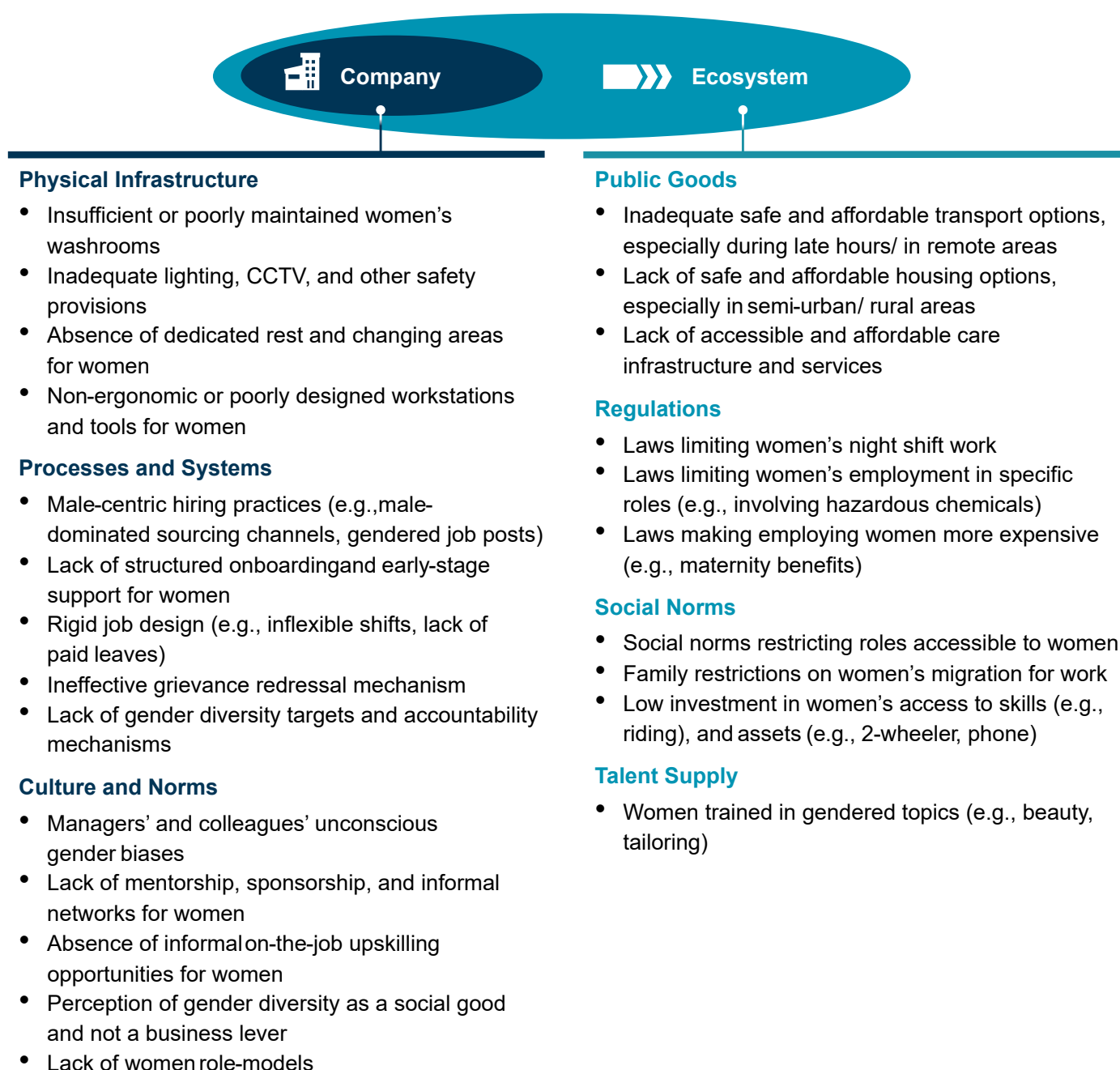
31 SEWA Bharat, “Employment Opportunities for Women in India’s Growing Financial Sector: A Quick Study Across Four States”

32 World Bank, “India Country Economic Memorandum 2024.” Available at: <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/400139d320ead96a0ec624d3608d9b56-0310012025/original/India-Country-Economic-Memorandum-2024-0227c.pdf>

4. Barriers hindering progress

Women's participation remains low despite a large pool of entry-level jobs and women's willingness to work, due to barriers within companies and across the broader ecosystem (See Figure 1). Company barriers include physical infrastructure that does not address women's needs, processes and systems that remain male-centric, and workplace culture and norms that allow gender biases to persist and do not treat diversity as a business imperative. Ecosystem barriers include inadequate public goods that constrain women's ability to access and hold jobs, regulations that limit or increase the cost of employing women, social norms that restrict women's access to jobs, assets, and skills, and talent supply constraints that limit the range of job roles available to women.

Figure 1. Barriers hindering women's participation in formal, entry-level roles

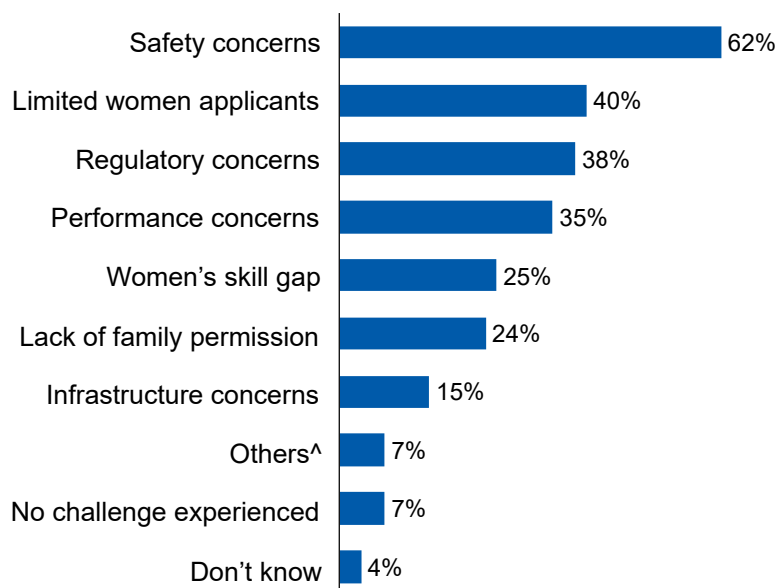


Barriers within companies

Many company-level barriers stem from industries having evolved around a predominantly male workforce.

FSG's work with 20+ companies and interactions with 200+ CXOs, managers, and recruiters revealed similar barriers across industries. For decades, workforces were predominantly male, so the infrastructure (e.g., equipment), processes (e.g., onboarding), and work practices (e.g., shift timings) were largely designed around the needs and circumstances of men. Limited consideration was given to caregiving responsibilities or mobility constraints that disproportionately impact women. This legacy also shapes workplace culture, as broader social norms about gender roles translate into unconscious biases that managers and colleagues carry. For example, an audit study of marital-status discrimination in India found that married women were significantly less likely to be invited for interviews than otherwise identical single women (2.85% compared with 4.48%), while married men faced no such discrimination.³³ All these aspects make it difficult for women to enter, remain, and thrive in the workforce.

Chart 7. Challenges to hiring women in entry-level roles, as cited by managers (n=55)³⁴



^ Includes preference to work near family residence

"Hiring women for late shifts becomes difficult because we must provide transport if they work after 7 PM or before 6 AM. This increases operational costs and is not always feasible for the business."

– Manager, Café chain

"Many warehouses do not have separate washrooms for women."

– Team Lead, Warehousing company

"Families don't allow women to leave their hometown for job. For example, last year we made offers to 12-13 women, however, only 1 woman joined."

– HR Head, Tractor manufacturing company



33 Abu Afzal Tauheed, "(En)gendering marital status in the Indian job market: An experimental study [Conference paper] (2023)." Annual Conference on Economic Growth and Development (ACEGD), Indian Statistical Institute, Delhi

34 FSG's digital survey to understand managers' perspectives on diversifying the talent pool in frontline/ blue-collar roles

Illustration: Are women not interested or were they not invited?

Two recruiters filling the same role reach opposite conclusions about women.

Ravi advertises a packing role to be filled in 3 days, asking interested candidates to apply. He shares it via the channel he always uses (e.g., WhatsApp groups), not realising that it accesses mostly men. The ad also lacks details that women weigh in before applying (e.g., job location). He does not realise his job ad is inequitable and assumes interested women would apply. When none do, he concludes women are not interested in the role.

Puneet advertises the same packing role but by making the ad more gender equitable. He provides additional lead time, explicitly invites women to apply, and provides details that women value. 10 women apply now for the same role. This reiterates to Puneet that women are interested in entry-level roles.

	Requirement	Job advertisement	Market response	Perception
Ravi, HR executive	3 packers needed in 3 days	Urgent hiring for packer Salary: 15,000 – 18,000 Location: Delhi Education: 12 th Pass and above Interested candidates call me @ 99911xxxxx	30 men apply 3 men hired	Women are not interested in the packing role
Puneet, HR executive	3 packers would be needed in 10 days	Hiring women and men packers Salary: 16,000 + PF + ESIC Location: Bawana, Delhi Education: 10 th Pass required No experience required Subsidised lunch available Free transport from Teli metro Interested candidates call Puneet @ 99911xxxxx Share with friends	50 men and 10 women apply 2 men and 1 woman hired	Women are interested in the packing role

Companies are aware of some of these barriers and understand how to fix them. However, even when barriers are visible and the fixes are well understood, **companies often lack knowledge of the business case for gender diversity in their specific context/ job roles. This leaves them without the motivation to act.** Other business priorities take precedence over the diversity agenda, and limited resources and skill gaps make change feel expensive and uncertain.

Barriers across the ecosystem

Beyond the company, a second set of barriers exist in the ecosystem. They span four areas:

Public goods: Absence of employment-enabling public goods pose a critical barrier for women

- **Mobility and connectivity** is a key barrier. Women make 84% of their work trips by public, intermediate-public, or non-motorised transport.³⁵ Inadequate options make the commute harder, with difficulties compounding in remote areas or during late nights. Weak first/ last-mile connectivity, poorly lit streets, and digital dark zones (areas without mobile service) raise safety concerns, adding to the challenges women face. Women therefore end up spending more on transport to stay safe, a 'pink tax' on getting to work.
- **Safe, affordable, and convenient housing** is scarce, increasing the friction that comes with women's migration, limiting access to certain roles (e.g., jobs in remote factories). Public provision remains minimal, with the Working Women Hostel scheme (Sakhi Niwas) counting only 523 hostels as of 2024.³⁶ Where affordable public options do exist, design gaps such as curfews, lack of kitchens, or restrictions on bringing minor children leave housing provisions under-utilised (occupancy rates are as low as 43% in Odisha and 63% in Karnataka).³⁷ Private supply is thin too, as companies and industrial parks rarely build housing alongside jobs. This leads to a persistent gap — women do not migrate without accommodation, and developers/ companies do not build accommodation without the assurance of demand.
- **Care infrastructure and services** are inadequate. Indian women spend 8x more time on unpaid care work than men. Nearly 44% of women cite childcare as the primary reason for not being able to join the workforce.³⁸ Even where care infrastructure exists, they do not adequately solve women's needs. For example, Anganwadi-cum-crèches under the Government of India's Palna scheme typically operate only 4-5 hours a day making them inadequate for working mothers who require full day support. Further, lactation facilities are mostly absent in public spaces.
- **The availability of safe, functional public toilets** also constitutes a core infrastructure gap, limiting the distance a woman can travel and the number of hours she can remain outside for work.

Regulations: Some well-intended regulations limit the roles available to women and increase the cost of employing them. Some states continue to prohibit women from working in night shifts, and/ or in hazardous processes (e.g., certain roles involving chemicals). This restricts job opportunities available to women, especially in large, growing industries like logistics and manufacturing which have a sizeable portion of their workforce in night shifts. Further, employer obligations such as provision of maternity benefits and pick-up/ drop for night shifts unintentionally raise the cost of employing women, reducing their competitiveness relative to men. Employers often cite this as a reason for not hiring women.

Social norms: Prevailing norms dictate whether and where a woman can work. Whether a role is deemed appropriate for women depends on numerous factors such as respectability of the job, location and type of workplace, timings, and mobility requirements. Families do not allow women to take up certain jobs or work in certain locations. Women are often not permitted to migrate, limiting their access to roles in distant areas (e.g., manufacturing roles in industrial areas, roles in construction sites). These norms, along with limited exposure to women in non-traditional roles, also shape women's preferences and aspirations, influencing the types of work they see as appropriate or possible (e.g., fewer women consider field roles or jobs outside standard daytime hours).

Talent supply: Pipeline gaps limit women's participation in few roles. In long-term skilling through Industrial

35 Ollivier, G., Nikore, M., & Natasha, S., "Toolkit for Enabling Gender Responsive Urban Mobility and Public Spaces: India, Volume I," World Bank (2022). Available at: <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/099651410192229435>

36 Singal, K., Karthick, M. P., Chaudhary, P., & Misra, G., "Applying Gender Lens to Women Economic Empowerment Enablers to Drive Female Labour Force Participation Rate," The Udaiti Foundation (2025). Available at: https://backend.udaiti.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Udaiti_White-Paper-on-Safe-Accommodation-for-Working-Women-1.pdf

37 Singal, K., Karthick, M. P., Chaudhary, P., & Misra, G., "Applying Gender Lens to Women Economic Empowerment Enablers to Drive Female Labour Force Participation Rate," The Udaiti Foundation (2025). Available at: https://backend.udaiti.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Udaiti_White-Paper-on-Safe-Accommodation-for-Working-Women-1.pdf

38 PLFS Annual Report 2025

Training Institutes (ITIs), women are under-represented in technical trades and high-demand employment pathways (e.g., auto manufacturing). Between 2019 and 2024, women constituted only 12.65% of ITI enrolment.³⁹ Further, women are largely absent from emerging sectors. For instance, under India's renewable energy skilling programs, women accounted for only ~12% of the 23,069 professionals trained.⁴⁰ A study conducted by EY and the Directorate General of Training (DGT) highlights several reasons for this gap including inadequate physical infrastructure, segregation in trades, male dominated staffing, and high dropout rates of women.⁴¹ Similar pattern persists in short-term skilling. Women are over 50% of PMKVY⁴² enrolments and placements, yet they are disproportionately channeled into gendered courses — women constitute 98% in beauty and wellness courses and 96% in apparel, against just 6% in construction, 11% in automotive, and 15% in power.⁴³

Barriers apply differently across roles

Barriers to women's employment, whether rooted in perceptions (e.g., unconscious biases) or reality (e.g., lower access to mobility skills), affect job roles differently. Every role comprises a set of requirements, and each requirement influences a company's willingness to hire women. As the number and intensity of these requirements increase, so does the difficulty women face in accessing the role.

Companies readily hire women for roles that involve teaching, caregiving, handling children, precision-based tasks (e.g., handling small components), or convincing customers. This partly explains the relatively high representation of women in teaching, caregiving, tobacco manufacturing, electronics manufacturing, and certain customer service roles. These roles are often perceived to align with women's natural abilities, with employers more readily seeing the business value of hiring women and actively recruiting them despite the need for additional investments (e.g., hostels).



39 NITI Aayog, "Girls and Women at the Centre: Advancing Non-Traditional Livelihoods in India" (2026). Available at: <https://www.niti.gov.in/sites/default/files/2026-06/Girls-and-Women-at-the-Centre-Advancing-Non-Traditional-Livelihoods-in-India.pdf>

40 Saur Energy, "Renewable Energy Workforce Grows, Yet Women Account for Just 12% of Trainees" (2026). Available at: <https://www.saurenergy.com/solar-energy-news/renewable-energy-workforce-grows-yet-women-account-for-just-12-of-trainees-12185037>

41 Directorate General of Training and EY, Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (2024). Available at: https://dgt.gov.in/sites/default/files/2024-02/Gender_Study_1.pdf

42 Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana, a flagship short-term skilling programme under the Skill India Mission

43 National Skill Development Corporation, "Gender Analysis: PMKVY 2016–2020 – Short-Term Training," NSDC/ MSDE (2020)

In contrast, companies are often reluctant to hire women for roles involving high physical demands (e.g., heavy lifting, prolonged standing), close-proximity work (e.g., in restaurant kitchens), unsafe working conditions (e.g., outdoor work, handling hazardous materials, remote locations), frequent travel, shifts outside daytime hours, demanding performance targets, technical skill requirements, potential client misbehaviour, or tasks that are socially perceived as inappropriate for women.

Together, these requirements create a spectrum of role accessibility for women. For example, a retail associate role is relatively accessible because it involves few of the above-mentioned requirements, with moderate physical demands and limited work outside daytime hours. A warehouse picker role is moderately difficult to access due to requirements such as physical demands, remote location, and prevailing social norms. In contrast, a delivery agent role combines several of these requirements including outdoor work, high mobility requirements, physical demands, client interaction, and social norms that discourage women from undertaking such work, making it one of the least accessible entry-level roles for women.

This spectrum also shapes employer behaviour. Companies are generally more willing to invest in hiring women in job roles where barriers are few and the business case is clear. Where barriers accumulate and business case is less certain, employers are more hesitant to make these investments.

Together, these barriers and associated perceptions explain why gender diversity initiatives have not succeeded. Company and ecosystem barriers are mutually reinforcing. Therefore, progress on one front stalls without progress on the other. Solving the issue therefore demands coordinated action from both companies and the ecosystem. The next section discusses how companies and the broader ecosystem should act and what they can do together.

5. The way forward

Boosting women's participation in entry-level roles at scale requires coordinated action across multiple stakeholders. Different stakeholders are uniquely positioned to influence different levers of change. Companies can create more inclusive workplaces through changes to infrastructure, processes, and culture. Governments can contribute by strengthening public infrastructure, improving service delivery systems, and encouraging employer participation. Philanthropy can catalyse innovation by funding and de-risking new models (e.g., public-private partnership for women's transport), generating evidence, and supporting scale-up of solutions. Other ecosystem actors (e.g., industry associations, CSOs,⁴⁴ NGOs,⁴⁵ think tanks) can help shape norms and build implementation capacity.

Adding millions of women to India's formal workforce requires solutions that can be applied at scale. Therefore, the insights presented are intentionally broad and applicable across industries, job roles, and geographies. They focus on the “what” rather than prescribing the “how”. The specific implementation approach will vary by context and may require coordinated action across multiple actors. This section presents 15 insights for different stakeholders (summarised in Figure 2), building on solutions that have been explored, piloted, or embedded across organisations and systems.



⁴⁴ CSO: Civil society organisation

⁴⁵ NGO: Non-governmental organisation

Figure 2. Insights to boost women's participation in entry-level roles



1 Improve workplace infrastructure: Companies can invest in infrastructure to create safer, more accessible, and more productive workplaces for women. Foundational investments include safety provisions (e.g., CCTV, adequate lighting, SOS mechanisms, safety kits for field workers) and functional, accessible sanitation facilities (e.g., women-only washroom, sanitary disposal mechanisms). As companies expand women's participation, they can further invest in transportation support, particularly for remote locations or night shifts, inclusive equipment (e.g., PPEs⁴⁶ for different body sizes) and workstations (e.g., height adjustable workbench), safe accommodation support (e.g., verified PG⁴⁷ contacts, own hostels), and on-site childcare. To improve affordability, companies can explore shared infrastructure models with relevant players (e.g., nearby employers, industrial parks, local ecosystem partners).

2 Make company's processes inclusive: Companies can make gradual changes to their processes and systems to reach a broader pool of women candidates, and support women's retention and career progression. Four key levers can be explored:

- **Expand women's access to opportunities:** Companies can begin by prioritising women for select roles that are perceived more suitable or easier to integrate (e.g., packers/ assembly line workers/ quality executives in day shift), before expanding to more challenging roles (e.g., machine operators, afternoon/ night-shift

46 PPE: Personal protective equipment

47 PG: Paying guest

roles). To attract women candidates, hiring collaterals can be made inclusive — by explicitly stating women's eligibility (e.g., "both men and women can apply"), and including details that women value (e.g., shift timings, salary break-down, travel requirements, pick-up/ drop facility).

- **Strengthen retention and career progression:** Structured onboarding and accessible grievance redressal mechanisms (e.g., a designated woman point of contact, anonymous complaint box) can help women succeed, particularly when entering non-traditional roles. Companies can also support long-term retention through in-house upskilling, flexible work options (where feasible), and objective promotion criteria.
- **Diversify talent pipelines:** As companies mature, they can expand beyond traditional recruitment channels that might systematically filter out women (e.g., local contractors who only provide male candidates). Companies can explore alternative channels such as community mobilisers, certified institutions (e.g., women ITIs⁴⁸), skilling/ training providers (via train-and-deploy models), and blue/ grey-collar job portals. Apprenticeships and internships offer another route, giving women a supported entry into roles, particularly non-traditional ones, where direct hiring could be harder.
- **Align incentives and accountability:** Companies can reinforce inclusive hiring by introducing women referral programs, linking recruiter and manager incentives/ KPIs⁴⁹ to gender diversity outcomes, and embedding gender diversity expectations within third-party contracts (e.g., for contract manufacturers or franchisees).

3 Shift workplace culture and norms: Companies can foster a more inclusive workplace by sensitising managers and colleagues to unconscious biases, promoting respectful behaviour, and strengthening organisational commitment to gender diversity. Regular gender sensitisation trainings and workplace conduct posters can help reinforce expectations around respectful, safe, and fair behaviour. Buddy systems (particularly for field roles or roles where women have limited access to peer networks), mentorship programs, and video testimonials from existing women employees can provide practical support, build confidence, and improve women's day-to-day experience. Companies can further strengthen organisational buy-in by documenting and disseminating the business benefits of gender diversity (e.g., reduced error rates, lower absenteeism), helping re-position diversity as a business imperative rather than solely a social good.

4 Document role-specific business benefits: Leading companies, funders/ investors, think tanks, and industry associations can support pilots to generate evidence on the business benefits of employing women in entry-level roles. While a broad business case exists,⁵⁰ evidence remains limited for entry-level roles, where the benefits are likely to differ across roles. For example, employing more women may improve sales in customer-facing retail roles, while it may reduce error rates or absenteeism in manufacturing roles. Tracking, quantifying, and communicating business benefits can motivate companies to expand their gender diversity efforts and unlock more resources for the same. Further, pilot data from a few companies can generate credible, role-specific evidence that can inform and accelerate adoption across the industry.

5 Foster industry dialogue: Many business leaders and HR heads are already aware of the best practices to improve gender diversity. Yet adoption remains low, as they are unconvinced of the business benefits of hiring more women. Through regular forums, case studies, and peer learning, companies, industry associations, and funders can demonstrate evidence of real-world gains, encouraging more companies to act.

6 Strengthen public infrastructure: Access to safe, affordable, and appropriate infrastructure, including transportation, accommodation, sanitation, childcare, and public safety, is critical to boost women's workforce participation. Clear design and implementation standards can help promote more gender-responsive infrastructure. Illustrative measures include:

48 ITIs: Industrial Training Institutes

49 KPI: Key Performance Indicator

50 Based on FSG's secondary research. Indicative sources: ILO "The business case for change" (2019) with sample size of 12,940 organisations across 70 countries; BCG "How Diverse Leadership Teams Boost Innovation" (2018) with sample size of 1,700+ organisations in 8 countries

- **Transportation:** Guidelines for gender-responsive multimodal transport planning that improves shift-timed connectivity to industrial and commercial clusters.
 - **Accommodation:** Guidelines for working women's hostels, focussing on relaxing curfews that limit women's access to night-shift jobs, and prioritising expansion in industrial clusters and commercial hubs.
 - **Childcare:** Ensure operating hours cover full shifts and commute times, prioritise industrial clusters and commercial hubs, and enable the use of suitable infrastructure such as municipal schools.
 - **Sanitation:** Standard for publication of open toilet data, including location, availability of women's facilities, and staffing status.
 - **Public safety:** Minimum lighting and CCTV standards for high commercial activity/ industrial corridors, improved patrolling, and higher women's representation in frontline policing through recruitment targets.⁵¹
- 7 Introduce standards for industrial parks:** Include provision of gender-responsive infrastructure as part of the guidelines for industrial parks and Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSME) clusters. The infrastructure can be financed from the park's common area maintenance charge. Guidelines can include provision of (a) pooled, shift-timed transport facilities, (b) shared crèche facilities, and (c) affordable, gender-segregated hostels, within or adjacent to the park/ cluster. In addition, critical design considerations can be incorporated in the guidelines. Examples include safety provisions (e.g., live tracking) for transport facilities and full shift-time coverage for crèche facilities.
 - 8 Improve infrastructure in job clusters:** Prioritise industrial clusters, high footfall commercial areas, and commercialised peri-urban areas in infrastructure expansion plans. This can include improving last-mile connectivity, augmenting bus fleets (alongside fare subsidy measures), building and maintaining toilets for women, and augmenting safety measures (e.g., streetlights, panic buttons), amongst others.
 - 9 Incentivise gender-diverse hiring:** Encourage employers to prioritise gender diversity by strengthening disclosures, recognising champions, and aligning financial incentives with gender outcomes. Measures could include expanding SEBI BRSR⁵² gender data disclosures to more companies and to cover workers hired via (sub)contractors, instituting annual gender diversity awards, publishing employer scorecards, and linking existing incentive schemes (e.g., industry promotion schemes) to gender diversity performance. Together, these measures can increase transparency, create positive competition among employers, and encourage sustained investment in hiring and retaining women.
 - 10 Run mindset-shift campaigns:** Initiate campaigns to encourage families and communities to support women's paid work (including in non-traditional roles) and promote shared caregiving responsibilities amongst spouses. The campaigns can leverage digital media, rural and urban livelihood missions, and self-help group networks to reach households at scale. Philanthropy can co-fund these campaigns, and NGOs/ CSOs can support with implementation capacity.
 - 11 Shape aspirations via school curriculum:** Shape aspirations early by making school curricula gender inclusive. Textbooks and other teaching learning material (TLM) can portray women in non-traditional occupations (e.g., machine operators, warehouse supervisors) so girls can see these paths as open to them. Role-model sessions (in-person sessions and video testimonials of successful women), workplace visits, and career counselling that presents the full range of livelihoods, can further widen the options girls consider.
 - 12 Address barriers in the regulatory environment:** Regulations can be made more conducive to employing women. Priority areas can include introducing statutory paid paternity leave, financed through ESIC,⁵³ to promote more equal caregiving responsibilities, and issuing model guidelines to support states in

51 Evidence shows that women's police stations are associated with a 29% rise in the reporting of crimes against women (Amaral, S., Bhalotra, S., & Prakash, N. (2021). "Gender, crime and punishment: Evidence from women police stations in India (IZA Discussion Paper No. 14250)". Institute of Labor Economics. Available at: <https://www.iza.org/publications/dp/14250>)

52 SEBI: Security and Exchange Board of India; BRSR: Business Responsibility and Sustainability Reporting

53 ESIC: Employees' State Insurance Corporation

operationalising provisions for women's night-shift employment under the new labour codes.⁵⁴ Together, these reforms can expand women's access to a wider range of jobs while reducing unintended disincentives for employers.

- 13 Strengthen implementation of existing regulations:** Improve the implementation of existing labour provisions by notifying rules that enable women's employment in night shifts under the new labour codes.⁵⁵ Further, clarify common misconceptions among employers — priority areas include increasing awareness that maternity benefits for women employees covered under ESIC are financed through the scheme rather than individual employers⁵⁶ and clarifying that the statutory crèche requirement for establishments with 50 or more employees applies irrespective of the gender composition of the workforce. Better communication and implementation of existing provisions can remove perceived barriers (e.g., additional cost for maternity leave coverage) to hiring women without requiring new legislation.
- 14 Improve gender diversity in non-traditional skilling:** Improve women's participation in non-traditional roles by increasing gender diversity within ITIs and short-term skilling programmes. This can include introducing non-traditional trades (e.g., electrical work, machine operation, solar panel installation) in women's ITIs and setting minimum targets for women's enrolment in these trades across ITIs and short-term skilling programmes. Expanding women's access to technical training can strengthen the talent pipeline for sectors where companies face shortages of women candidates.
- 15 Implement outcome-linked skilling:** Funders can support outcome-based skilling programmes that prepare women for employment in non-traditional roles and link funding to placement and retention. Delivered by NGOs and training organisations in partnership with employers, these programmes can focus on technical/operational training for non-traditional roles (e.g., machine operator, electrician, rooftop solar installer, delivery agent), along with workplace readiness, job placement support, and initial handholding to reduce early attrition (e.g., via 1:1 check-ins during the first 2 weeks). Demonstrating successful train-and-deploy models can build evidence, encourage company adoption, and expand women's access to a wider range of job roles.

India's gender-inequitable workforce is the result of decades of decisions across policies, workplace practices, infrastructure, and social norms. Transforming this system and increasing women's participation will require sustained action across companies, governments, funders, and the broader ecosystem. While no single intervention will be sufficient, coordinated efforts across stakeholders can address the structural barriers that limit women's access to and progression in work. By acting collectively and at scale, India can expand women's access to quality jobs while delivering lasting benefits for businesses, households, and the economy.

Refer to Annexure section for suggestions on how companies can sequence their actions, insights on urban women's work preferences, and case studies on company and ecosystem initiatives.

54 Effective 21 November 2025, the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020 permits women nationwide to opt for night shifts. However, implementation is governed by state-specific regulations, which are not yet rolled out completely

55 Effective 21 November 2025, the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020 permits women nationwide to opt for night shifts

56 For women earning within the Employees' State Insurance wage ceiling (Currently INR 21,000 a month, and INR 25,000 for persons with disabilities), maternity benefit is paid by ESIC at full average daily wages for twenty-six weeks from pooled employer and employee contributions, not by the employer directly. Available at: <http://esic.gov.in/information-benefits>

6. Annexure

I. Sequenced interventions for companies

Companies can drive meaningful change by embedding inclusion across their physical infrastructure, processes and systems, and culture and norms. **However, a phased approach is necessary because no company can change everything at once.** Resources are limited, some solutions require greater organisational commitment, and actions that disrupt the status quo face resistance. Companies can therefore sequence their solutions based on three considerations:

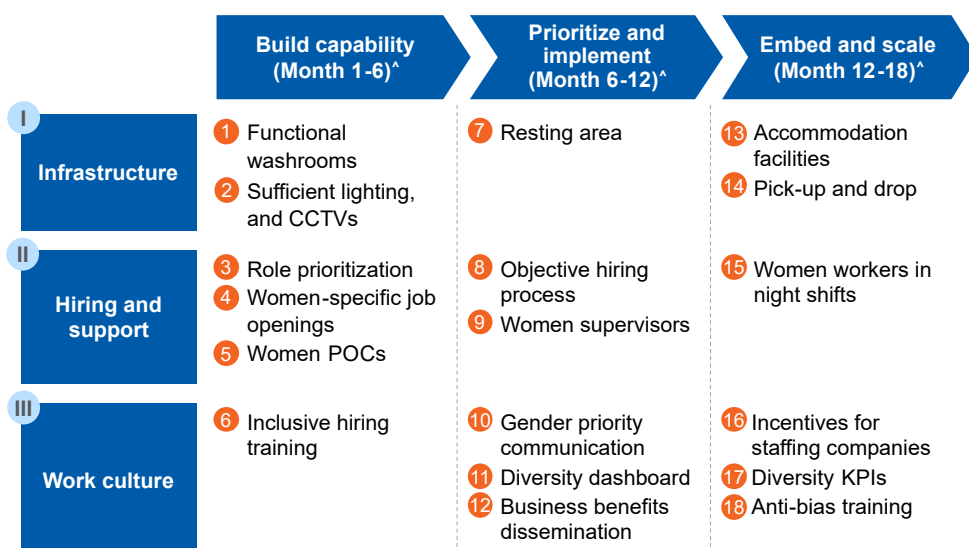
- **Cost:** Some solutions require a capital investment (e.g., transport support) while others can be implemented with minimal/ no additional expenditure (e.g., gender-inclusive job ad)
- **Effort:** Some solutions demand greater time, coordination, buy-in, or organisational commitment (e.g., business benefits documentation and dissemination) while others do not (e.g., workplace conduct posters)
- **Pre-requisites:** Certain solutions must be in place before hiring women or before other solutions can be effective. For example, basic safety provisions (e.g., SOS mechanisms) are a prerequisite for hiring women in field roles. Similarly, gender sensitisation trainings are critical before introducing women in new workplaces/ roles

Companies can begin their gender diversity journey with 2-3 low-cost, targeted interventions, focusing on quick wins. Documenting the benefits of these changes can help build internal buy-in, strengthen the business case, and unlock additional resources for more ambitious changes. Through this phased approach, companies can gradually become more inclusive, leading to more women being hired and retained in their workplace.

To support companies in taking these steps, **FSG has developed industry-wise, phased roadmaps** which can be accessed here: [Link](#). For reference, Figure 3 below is the phased roadmap developed for warehousing roles based on pilots with multiple companies.

Figure 3. Roadmap to improve gender diversity in warehousing roles

Warehousing companies can implement 18 interventions in a phased manner to improve gender diversity*



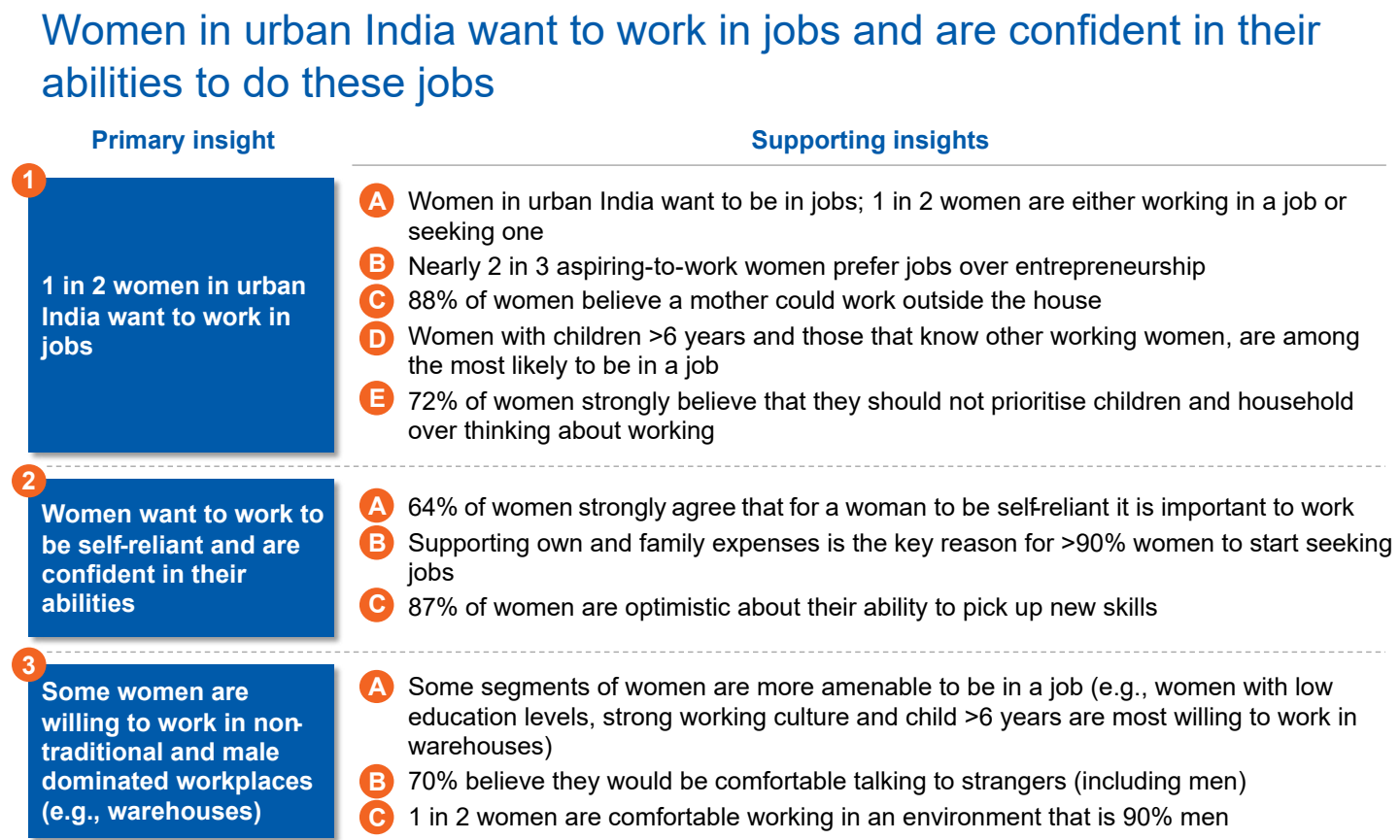
* Based on GLOW's interactions with ~20 warehousing companies, pilots with ~4 companies, and interviews with ~6,600 women;

[^] Timelines are indicative; Acronyms—POCs: Points of Contact; KPIs: Key Performance Indicators

II. Urban women’s willingness to work

To build a nuanced understanding of why women are being held back and what their preferences towards employment are, FSG interviewed 6,600+ women across 16 cities in India. The research revealed that women are willing to work, confident in their abilities, and open to non-traditional roles. To learn more, access the full report here: [Link](#).

Figure 4. Urban women’s work preferences



Note: Unless explicitly mentioned, 'women' in this document refers to women aged 15 and 59 years from households with low income (i.e. households having an average monthly household income of INR 18,000 or USD 240 and below) in urban India. Data source: FSG's interviews with 6,600 women and 550 key decision makers from urban households with low-income in 16 cities across 14 states in India.

III. Case studies: Creating inclusive workplaces

A. Improving gender diversity at a farm equipment manufacturer⁵⁷

Context

The company is one of India's largest farm equipment manufacturers, producing tractors and offering other comprehensive farming solutions.

Challenges faced

- Cultural resistance from managers and colleagues
- Safety concerns
- Limited enrolment of women in technical trades

Response

- **Workplace redesign:** Ergonomic adjustments, including robotics, raised platforms, and gravity mechanisms, which minimised physical strain and improved efficiency
- **On-the-job support:** Tailored on-the-job training programs for women such as dexterity modules
- **Safety measures:** GPS-enabled transport, buddy systems, and women security guards
- **New sourcing channels:** Collaborations with Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs), polytechnics, and Advanced Technical Institutes
- **Community engagement:** Parental counselling, shop-floor visits for families, addressing cultural concerns, and encouraging women to explore careers in manufacturing

Impact

- Gender diversity in tractor manufacturing increased by **~9 percentage points in 11 years**
- Productivity and operation efficiency improved as **women employees exhibited lower absenteeism and higher retention rates**

B. Improving hiring and retention of women associates at a flexi-staffing company⁵⁸

Context

The company is one of India's largest in the flexi-staffing industry, employing several thousand associates. Women make up for less than 20% of associates in the general staffing (non-IT) business, a ratio that has remained steady since 2021. The company has set a target of increasing this to 25% by 2027.

Challenges faced

- Logistical and safety challenges for associates placed in remote or industrial areas
- Drop-offs due to lack of family permission, job ads lacking necessary information, etc.
- High early attrition within the first three months (those who stay past 90 days go on to an average tenure of 13 months)

Response

- **Inclusive hiring:** Gender-neutral job descriptions, at least one woman recruiter on every interview panel, and placement of women in roles where they have historically succeeded
- **Onboarding and support:** Travel reimbursement for migrants, on-site officers and female liaison officers, accommodation assistance (via partnerships with PGs and hostels), and employee sentiment monitoring
- **Community and family engagement:** Community visits, and engagement with local leaders
- **Financial support and benefits access:** Interest-free loans, salary advances, and videos on ESIC⁵⁹ and PF⁶⁰ entitlements

⁵⁷ Based on publicly available information

⁵⁸ Based on publicly available information and insights from FSG's engagements with partner companies

⁵⁹ ESIC: Employees' State Insurance Corporation

⁶⁰ PF: Provident Fund

C. Increasing the number of women delivery partners at a hyperlocal delivery company⁶¹

Context

The company is one of India's largest hyperlocal delivery businesses. Women make up less than 0.5% of the company's delivery partners.

Challenges faced

- Safety concerns
- Lack of family permission
- Lack of women's access to mobility skills and assets

Response

- **Safety provisions:** 24x7 SOS support, safety and hygiene kit, option to report a location as unsafe, and opt-in for short-distance orders
- **Benefits and support:** WhatsApp groups for women partners in the same zone, period leave, and health, accident, and maternity insurance
- **Payouts:** Higher payouts for women partners
- **Skilling:** 2-wheeler training for women



⁶¹ Based on publicly available information and insights from FSG's engagements with partner companies

IV. Case studies: Building gender-responsive public infrastructure

A. Hyderabad's 'SHE Shuttle', employer-pooled transport at scale⁶²

The SHE Shuttle, run by the Society for Cyberabad Security Council in collaboration with Cyberabad Police, is a shared bus service for women working in Hyderabad's IT corridor. It began in 2015 with 2 buses and grew to a fleet of 18 by 2023, running from early morning to late evening, with a female attendant on board and real-time tracking. The buses carry over 1,600 women a day. The service is collectively funded rather than by any single firm: an industry security council coordinates routes across the corridor, individual employers sponsor specific buses under their CSR, and the Cyberabad police partner on safety.

B. Tamil Nadu's 'Thozhi hostel', rethinking working women's hostels⁶³

The Thozhi network in Tamil Nadu designs working women's hostels around the practical needs of women workers rather than administrative convenience. Where many hostels enforce curfews that make shift work impossible, or lack kitchens and adequate security, Thozhi hostels integrate these essential amenities, including on-site crèche services. Its Tambaram hostel, for example, runs at 97.5% occupancy, filling 461 of its 473 beds as of 2025.

⁶² Society for Cyberabad Security Council, "She-Shuttles." Available at: <https://scsc.in/she-shuttles/>; See also "18th SHE Shuttle bus service launched for working women in Balanagar, Kukatpally," NewsMeter (22 August 2023), available at: <https://newsmeter.in/hyderabad/hyderabad-18-she-shuttle-bus-service-launched-working-women-in-balanagar-kukatpally-715846>; and "SHE Shuttle a huge hit with women employees," The Hans India.

⁶³ Raghu, A. (2025, April 16). "Comfort, control, career: A peek into Tamil Nadu's Thozhi working women's hostels." BehanBox. Available at: <https://behanbox.com/2025/04/16/comfort-control-career-a-peek-into-tamil-nadus-thozhi-working-womens-hostels/>

V. Case studies: Shifting norms and mindsets

A. SEWA Sangini, childcare as a workers' cooperative⁶⁴

SEWA established the Sangini cooperative in Gujarat to provide accessible, community-based childcare for informal women workers. It runs full-day crèches located inside the communities where these women live. It employs childcare workers drawn from those same neighbourhoods and charges parents roughly one-third of the actual cost of care. Sangini supplies exactly the two features India's public childcare still misses — full-day hours matched to working shifts, and centres located near where women live rather than only where they work. Currently, 13 centres operate all over Gujarat.⁶⁵ The model goes to show that a community cooperative can run childcare services at a fraction of commercial cost.

B. Azad Foundation's 'Ghar Ka Kaam Sabka Kaam' campaign⁶⁶

Azad Foundation works to change entrenched gender norms both by training women for non-traditional livelihoods such as professional driving and by engaging boys and men directly through its work on positive masculinity. Its Men for Gender Justice programme, with MenEngage India and the Non-Traditional Livelihoods Network, launched the 'Ghar Ka Kaam Sabka Kaam' (housework is everyone's work) campaign on International Labour Day in 2024, using street performances, community workshops, documentary screenings, puppet theatre, and 'PAPA's Kitchen' events in which men take on cooking and household tasks. The campaign reached over 40,000 people across nine states with more than thirty partner organisations, showing that care norms shift when men are engaged directly as participants rather than bystanders, and that training women for non-traditional roles does not hold unless the household's care expectations shift with it.

⁶⁴ Nikore Associates, Karmannya Counsel, CII Centre for Women in Leadership, and Confederation of Indian Industry, "Formulating a Strategy for India's Care Economy: Unlocking Opportunities," supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India (March 2024). Available at: <https://static.pib.gov.in/WriteReadData/specificdocs/documents/2024/mar/doc202435319501.pdf>

⁶⁵ SEWA Federation, "From Sticky Floors to Open Doors: Childcare Access as a Key to Decent Work." Available at: <https://sewafederation.org/from-sticky-floors-to-open-doors-childcare-access-as-a-key-to-decent-work/>

⁶⁶ Azad Foundation, "Ghar Ka Kaam Sabka Kaam" campaign (2024). Available at: https://www.azadfoundation.com/events_news/ghar-ka-kaam-sabka-kaam-campaign/

VI. Case studies: Improving women talent pipelines

A. Kaabil, a corporate philanthropy initiative to boost talent pipelines⁶⁷

Kaabil is a skilling platform to prepare young women from low-income households for entry-level roles. It is built as an open platform that other employers recruit through, shape, and co-invest in. The platform helps generate data on women's aspiration, skills, role/ migration preferences, and retention across numerous employers that no single company can generate on their own. The model attempts to address both demand and supply-side gaps. On the demand-side, the platform works with employers' HR teams to adjust roles so they become more takeable for women (e.g., adjusting job descriptions to elicit greater interest from women applicants). The platform has 119 employers on-boarded till date and ~41,000 total job postings. On the supply-side, it works on skilling women through community partners such as the Naandi Foundation who train, counsel, and hand hold candidates to placement. Across 20 states, 41,152 candidates were placed in 2025, through the platform and allied channels such as Job Utsav (pooled job drives). By treating the skilling-to-employment gap as shared infrastructure, the platform hopes to show that one organisation's investment can become capacity the wider market can use.

⁶⁷ Based on inputs from the Kaabil leadership team and public information from Kaabil ("About Us," <https://kaabilprogram.org/about-us>) and Mahindra & Mahindra (Annual Report FY2026, <https://www.mahindra.com/annual-report-FY2026/92/>)

7. Glossary of terms

Casual labour⁶⁸: A person who is casually engaged in others' farm or non-farm enterprises (both household and non-household) and, in return, receives wages according to the terms of the daily or periodic work contract.

Entry-level roles: Frontline, blue- and grey-collar jobs that require no college degree and are typically open to candidates with a 10th or 12th grade education.

Formal job: A job is considered formal if the employer provides at least one of three benefits: social security such as Provident Fund (PF) or pension, a written job contract, or paid leave.

Gender diversity: The representation of women within a workforce, expressed as women's share of total employees in a role, firm, or sector.

Households with low income: Households with monthly income of INR 23,000 and below. Covers households falling into the socio-economic classes of A3 or below as per the New Consumer Classification System (NCCS). As per FSG's research, average monthly income of these households was INR 18,000 in 2021-22 (corresponding to inflation-adjusted figure of INR 23,000 in 2026).⁶⁹

Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR): Percentage of people aged 15 to 59 who are a) employed, or b) are unemployed but seeking work, or c) have expressed willingness to work.

Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS): India's official household survey to estimate the key employment and unemployment indicators. It is conducted by the National Statistical Office under the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MOSPI).

Regular wage/ salaried employees⁷⁰: Persons who work in others' farm or non-farm enterprises (both household and non-household) and, in return, receive salary or wages on a regular basis (i.e. not on the basis of daily or periodic renewal of work contract). This category includes not only persons getting time wage but also persons receiving piece wage (e.g., based on output) or salary and paid apprentices, both full-time and part-time.

Self-employed⁷¹: Persons who operate their own farm or non-farm enterprises or engage independently in a profession or trade on own-account or with one or a few partners. The essential feature of the self-employed is that they have autonomy (decide how, where, and when to produce) and economic independence (in respect of choice of market, scale of operation, and finance) for carrying out their operation. The remuneration of the self-employed consists of a non-separable combination of two parts: a reward for their labour and profit of their enterprise.

⁶⁸ Based on PLFS definition

⁶⁹ FSG, "Creating a Gender-Equitable Workforce in India" (2022). Available at: https://www.fsg.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Creating-a-Gender-Equitable-Workforce-in-India_vF.pdf

⁷⁰ Based on PLFS definition

⁷¹ Based on PLFS definition

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