

Lesser women in workforce: Assocham calls for remedial action

NEW DELHI: Flagging off the issue of fall in women's representation in the labour force by as much as 10 per cent between 2005 and 2014, Assocham today called for more steps to create an enabling environment to fix the anomaly.

The number of working women in India in 2000-05 jumped to 37 per cent from the 34 per cent earlier, but it has been on a downhill ever since, hitting 27 per cent in 2014, especially when the economy experienced solid growth, the industry body said, quoting World Bank report on World Development Indicators.

"There is an urgent need to create more jobs and entrepreneurship opportunities to promote women empowerment, making them economically independent as female labour force participation (FLFP) rate in India has fallen significantly by 10 per cent in the last decade," noted the Assocham-Thought Arbitrage Research study.

In terms of FLFP, India, with 27 per cent, is ranked lowest in the BRICS bloc. China remains well ahead at 64 per cent, followed by Brazil (59 per cent), the Russian Federation (57 per cent) and South Africa (45 per cent).

The study, titled 'Female Labour Force Participation in India', analyses India's performance on this front in comparison with the rest of the world and identifies barriers to its growth.

Given the turn in Indian economy in the 1990s, the chamber noted, it is natural to expect FLFP to increase due to rise in disposal incomes, job opportunities, education and healthcare.

It attributed the lower participation of women in the labour force to a host of factors, including lack of access to higher education, dearth of opportunities to work and even lack of flexibility in working conditions, which forces them to turn to domestic duties.

Further, the gap between rural male and Female Labour Force Participation in India in 2011 stood at about 30 per cent while in urban centres, it was more pronounced at about 40 per cent. "This can be attributed to social and cultural curtailment and often lack of work opportunities," the report added.

The study also highlighted that in India, marriage decreases the probability of FLFP by about eight per cent in rural areas and more than twice as much in urban localities.

It hailed initiatives such as Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Make in India and Start-up India, among others, as positive steps for improving female labour force participation in India.

However, more initiatives towards women's empowerment need to be taken to create an enabling environment for increasing female employment and entrepreneurship, noted the Assocham-TARI study.

As per the latest available data, the FLFP rate in India was about 36 per cent as of 2011-12, with 31 out of 35 states and union territories scoring rates below national average, while only the erstwhile Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Sikkim and Himachal Pradesh faring better in this regard.

The study suggested promoting skill training programmes for women, setting up child care centres in large numbers, ensuring women safety and security in every sphere through efforts by both Central and state governments and other such measures as imperative to boost female labour force participation.

Even a 10 per cent increase in FLFP rate can boost GDP by 0.3 per cent, according to the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP).