



GENDER GAPS AND GENDER INEQUALITY IN INDIA: A Statistical Overview

A synopsis of trends in India's Gender Gaps and Performance on Gender Indices in the last two decades

RESEARCH BRIEF #2

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April, 2023

Contents

INTRODUCTION	3
I. INDIA'S PERFORMANCE ON GLOBAL GENDER INDICES	4
I.1. World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index	4
I.2. Gender Gaps from the UN's Human Development Index	4
II. INDIA'S GENDER GAPS ACROSS VARIOUS DIMENSIONS.....	6
II.1 Gender Gaps in Women's Economic Participation	6
II.2 Gender Gaps in Earned Income and Wealth	7
II.3 The Leadership and Boardroom Gender Gaps	8
II.4 The Entrepreneurship Gender Gap	9
II.5 Gender Gap in Unpaid Care Work.....	9
II.6 Gender gaps in health and wellbeing	9
II.7 Gender gaps in education and literacy	10
II.8 Gender Gaps in Political empowerment.....	11
II.8 Gender Gaps in Financial Inclusion	12
III. CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS AND WAY FORWARD	13

INTRODUCTION

India has been one of the World's [fastest-growing economies](#) in the past decade and continues to be so even in the aftermath of the havoc created by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, consideration of reports on gender discrimination in various aspects of paint a different picture of India and suggest that the women have gained a much lower sharer of the country's rising prosperity.

There is, however, an urgent need to change this grim picture.

"Closing the employment gap between men and women could expand India's GDP by close to a third by 2050, equating to nearly \$6 trillion in constant US dollar terms".

- [Bloomberg Economics](#)

Bringing about a change in the gender statistics will require targeted, coordinated and bold actions from all the stakeholders of the ecosystem. However, to enable this change the first step is to acknowledge the extent of the problem at hand so that we can take specific and targeted actions to address the problems.

Therefore, in this paper, we present a brief overview of the data and research that measure the extent of economic inequalities between men and women in India. Whenever the data allows it, we also discuss how these inequalities have been changing over time. The trends in India's gender gaps over the years as well as the latest statistics show that most dimensions of economic gender inequalities persist, even though they are today smaller than they used to be a decade ago.

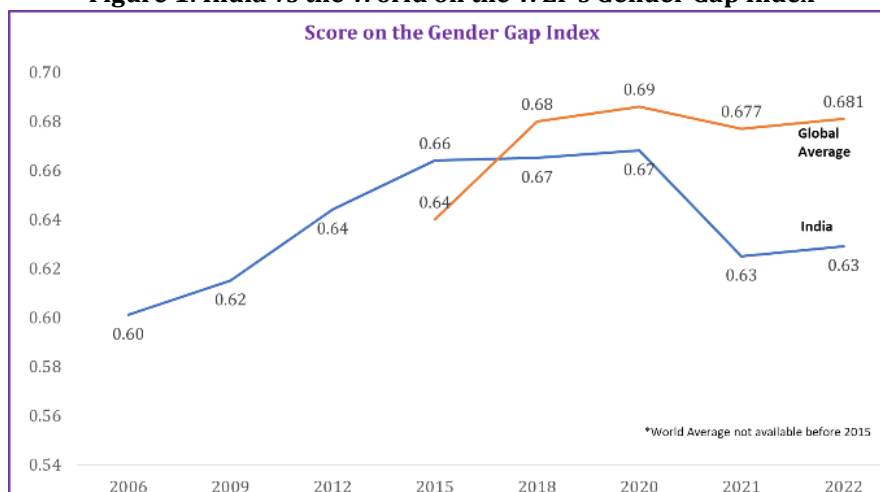
I. INDIA'S PERFORMANCE ON GLOBAL GENDER INDICES

India performs much lower than the global averages on various indices that measure and compare countries on the levels of Gender Inequality. The general trends show that India's Gender gaps have been decreasing but at a lower rate than global averages.

I.1. World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index

As per the [Global Gender Gap Report](#) by the World Economic Forum, India performs amongst the worst countries in terms of the size of its overall gender gap. India stood at 135th position out of 146 countries in 2022 on the Gender Inequality Index, having bridged 62.9% of the gender equality as compared to the 68.1% global average. India's rank was 108 out of 114 countries in 2015, when it had bridged 66.4% of the gender gap, which was higher than the global average of 64%. While India has steadily improved its score on the index (except during the Covid-19 lockdown year 2020-21), the pace of change is visibly slower than the world and the average score appears to be diverging from the global average (Figure 1).

Figure 1: India vs the World on the WEF's Gender Gap Index

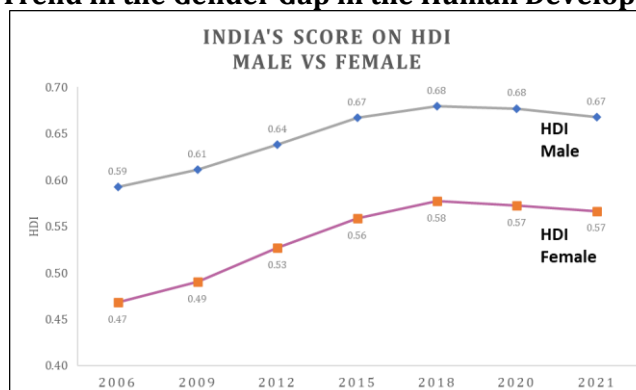


Source: [WEF Gender Gap Reports](#), various years

I.2. Gender Gaps from the UN's Human Development Index

The Annual Human Development Index calculated by the United Nations has certain parameters and sub-indices that measure gender gaps and gender inequality. The first measure is the difference in value of the Human Development Index between men and women. The [UN Human Development Report](#) suggests that HDI for men has always been higher than that for women (Figure 2). The gap has been constant and has not narrowed down.

Figure 2: Trend in the Gender Gap in the Human Development Index

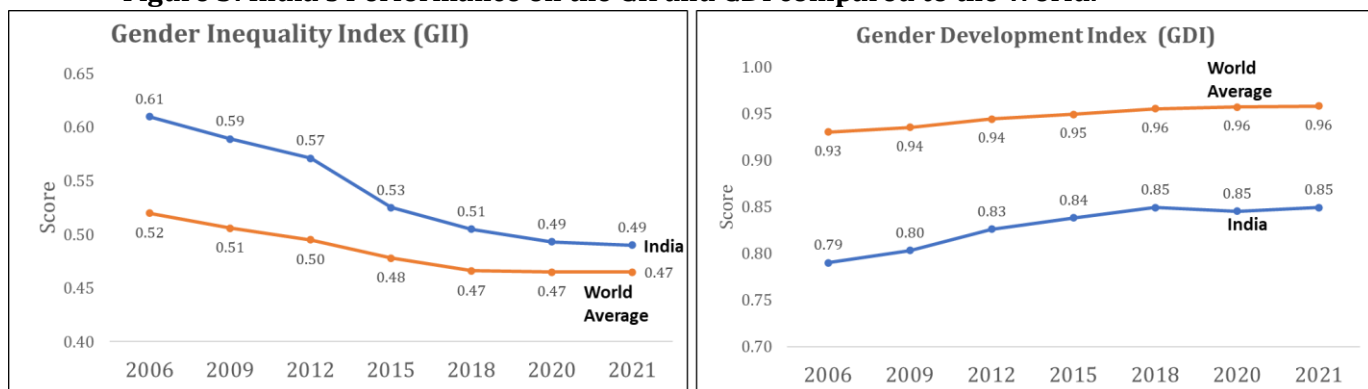


Source: Human Development Report [Database](#) for India

The second set of indices are the GII and GDI, that are sub-indices calculated within the HDI -

- **Gender Inequality Index (GII)** shows the loss in potential human development due to inequality between female and male achievements in three dimensions— reproductive health, empowerment (measured by population with at least secondary education and share of women in parliament) and the labour market participation. In 2021, as per [UN Human Development Report](#), India ranked 122 out of 170 countries in the Gender Inequality Index. The GII for India continues to remain below average but has been steadily improving and the gap with respect to world data has seen a steep fall (Figure 3).
- **The Gender Development Index (GDI)** measures gender inequalities in achievement in three basic dimensions of human development: health (measured by life expectancy at birth); education (measured by expected years of schooling for children and mean years of schooling for adult); and command over economic resources (measured by estimated earned income). As per the 2021 [UN Human Development Report](#), India's GDI value is 0.849, placing it into Group 5 (furthest from gender parity). Over the years, the gender development index has steadily moved upwards for India (Figure 3). However, there was a decline during the pandemic, but we are again on the path of improvement. The gap between India and the world is slowly closing.

Figure 3: India's Performance on the GII and GDI compared to the World.



Source: Human Development Report [Database](#) for India

II. INDIA'S GENDER GAPS ACROSS VARIOUS DIMENSIONS

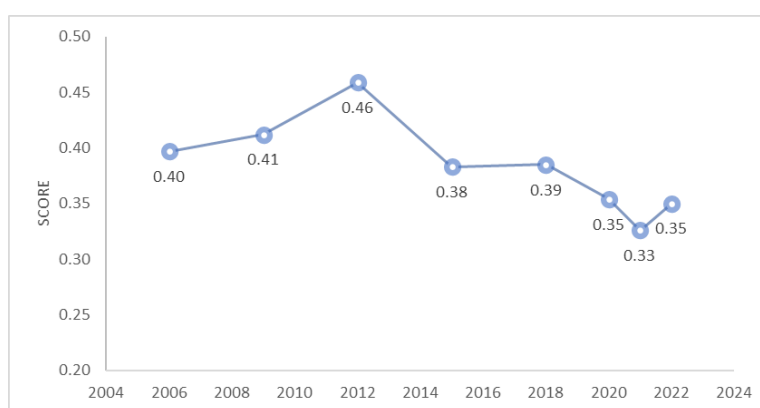
In this section, we will assess the gender gaps in various economic, social, and political spheres.

II.1 Gender Gaps in Women's Economic Participation

1. Index on Economic Participation and Opportunity

The index on Economic Participation and Opportunity given by the [Global Gender Gap Report](#) by World Economic Forum indicates that India is faring poorly. The score steadily moved up till 2012 but after that witnessed a continuous decline till 2021. However, there have been some improvements in recent times. In 2022, India ranks 143 out of 146 countries on this index with a score of 35% as compared to the 60.3% global average (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Trend in India's score on WEF's Economic Participation and Opportunity Index

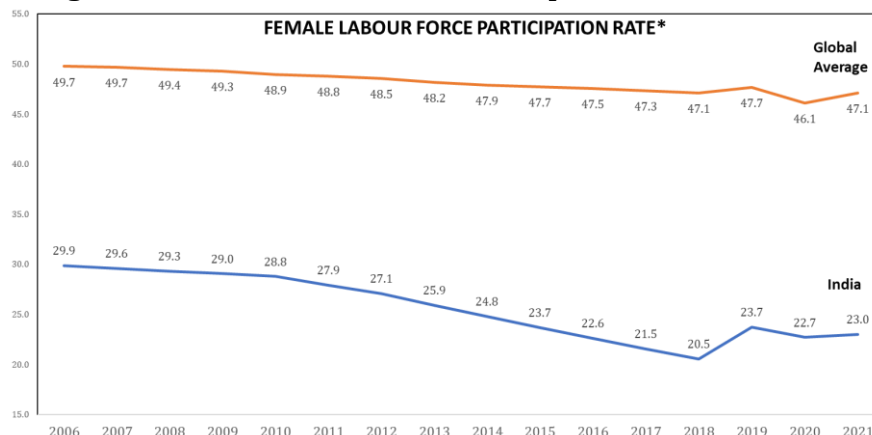


Source: [WEF Gender Gap Reports](#), various years

2. Labour Force Participation

Analysing various data trends in India's Female Labour force participation presents a very distressing picture. For example, as per [World Bank data](#), India's Female Labour Force Participation rate was about 23% in 2021, having fallen from nearly 30% in 2006 (Figure 5). The gap between the global average and India's FLFP has also gradually widened over the years.

Figure 5: Female Labour Force Participation Rate - India Vs World



Source – [World Bank](#)

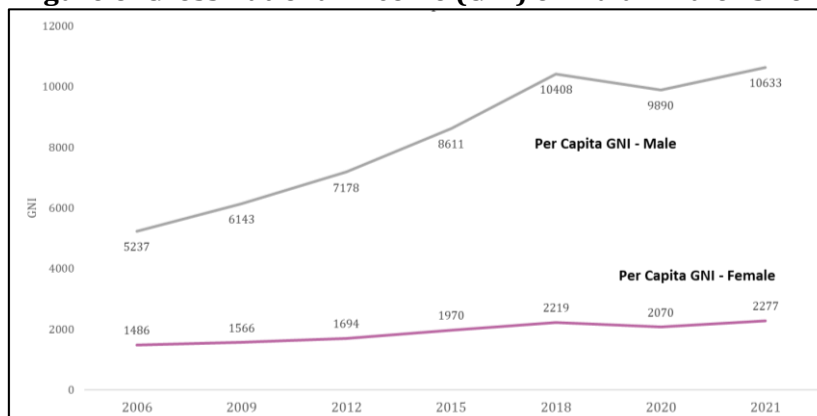
* Female Labour Force Participation (% of female population ages 15+) (modelled ILO estimate)

II.2 Gender Gaps in Earned Income and Wealth

1. Gender Gap in Per Capita Gross National Income

As per [UN Human Development Reports](#), Per Capita Income for males has always been higher than that for females but the gap has been increasing with time (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Gross National Income (GNI) of India – Male vs Female



Source: Human Development Report

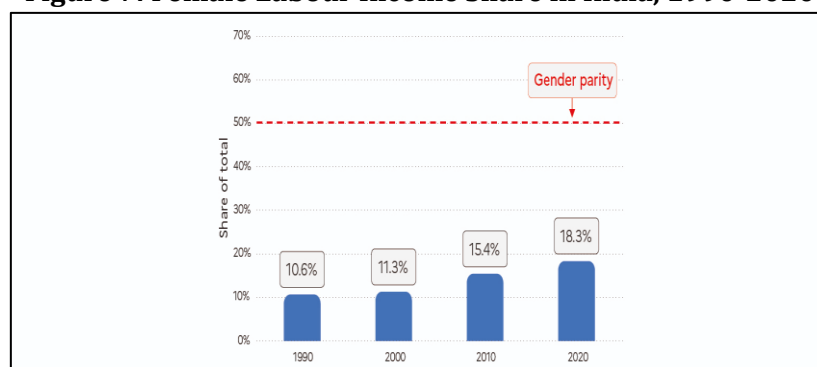
*Gross National Income Per Capita (2017 PPP\$)

2. Gender Wage Gap

Even after accounting for the differences in productivity, education status etc between men and women, the gender wage gap still exists and that can be explained by the discrimination against women. As per a research paper called [“The crisis of inequality in India”](#), on average, female workers earned only 43% of male workers when they were self-employed, 60% as casual workers and 77% as regular workers. Considering all employment types, female workers earned 62.5% of that of a male worker on average.

As per the report by [World Inequality Report](#), Indian women’s share of labour income in 2020 was about 18% (Figure 7). Although this was an increase of about 8 percentage points since 1990, it is one of the lowest in the world and lower than average of Asia (21%, excluding China).

Figure 7: Female Labour Income Share in India, 1990-2020

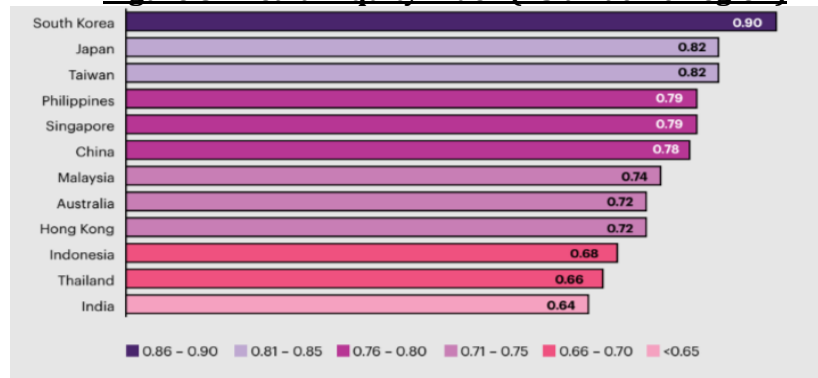


Source: [World Inequality Report](#)

3. Gender Wealth Gap

As per the [Global Gender Wealth Equity Report](#), the wealth equity index for the world was 74% implying that women's wealth accounted for 74% of that of men in 2022. India is the worst performer in the Asia-Pacific region with an index of 64% (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Wealth Equity Index (Asia Pacific Region)

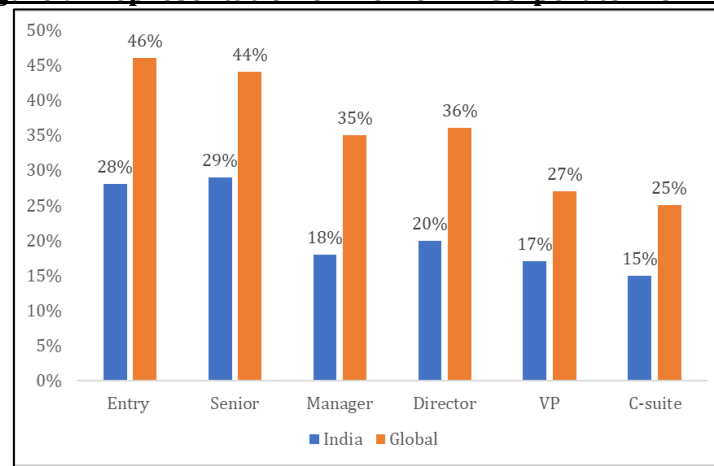


Source: [WTW](#) (Global Gender Wealth Equity Report)

II.3 The Leadership and Boardroom Gender Gaps

Representation of women in corporate leadership falls as we move up the seniority ladder. For instance, LinkedIn's data shows that in India, women account for only 15% of the C-suite roles (as compared to about 30% at the entry level) (Figure 9). In fact, [LinkedIn's research](#) shows that in India, men are 42% more likely to be promoted to a leadership position than women.

Figure 9: Representation of Women in Corporate Workforce



Source - [LinkedIn](#)

Other reports also reveal similar statistics. For instance, [The Credit Suisse Gender 3000 in 2021](#), report showed that in 2021 women held only 10% of management roles in Indian companies, compared to 31% Globally. Women held 17.1% of the board seats in India in 2021, compared to 19.7% of the board seats are held by women Globally ([Deloitte Global's Women in the boardroom report](#)). As per a [Deloitte study](#), in 2016, the share of women CEOs in India stood at 6.6% but declined to 3.4% in 2018, and to only 4.7% in 2021.

II.4 The Entrepreneurship Gender Gap

Women constitute only around 20% of total entrepreneurs in India, as compared to around 37% globally.

In a Female Entrepreneurship Index calculated by Global Entrepreneurship and Development Institute (GEDI), India ranks 70th out of 77 countries. According to the November 2020 report by IWWAGE, only 7 out of 100 entrepreneurs in India are women.

As per the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, in 2021 India ranked 18th out of 47 countries in terms of Female-Male TEA* Ratio (*TEA is Total early-stage Entrepreneurial Activity*)

II.5 Gender Gap in Unpaid Care Work

As per NSSO data, an average woman in India spends 19.5% of her time in domestic work or care-giving – vs men who spend just 2.5% of the 24-hour period on these activities. 81.2% women vs only 26.1% men are engaged in “unpaid domestic services for their household members” (in 2019). An Indian woman spends 243 minutes or a little over four hours a day on household chores, which is almost ten times the average 25 minutes for an Indian man.

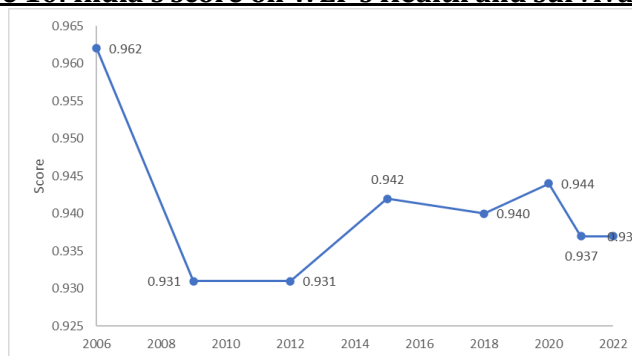
Women in India do almost 10 times as much unpaid work as men but if you include domestic duties in the definition of work, women’s labour force participation rates shoots up to 81.7 percent, while men’s remains stagnant at 76 percent – Mind The Gap: The State of Employment in India, Oxfam 2019

II.6 Gender gaps in health and wellbeing

1. Health and Survival

As per the Global Gender Gap Report by the World Economic Forum, India performs worst on this indicator, as it ranked 146 out of 146 countries in 2022. The health and survival index continuously fell till 2012 and thereafter there was some improvement. However, after COVID, the score again fell (Figure 10).

Figure 10: India’s score on WEF’s Health and survival index

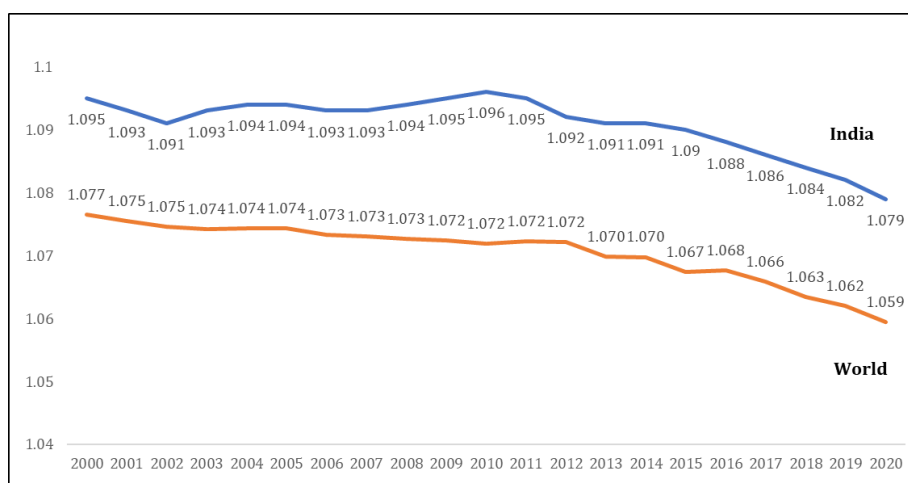


Source: WEF Gender Gap Reports, various years

2. Sex Ratio at Birth

India’s sex ratio at birth has been steadily falling and moving towards the global average (Figure 11). In 2021, per 100 female births India recorded about 108 male births, as compared to a global average of 106 male births.

Figure 11. Sex Ratio at Birth*



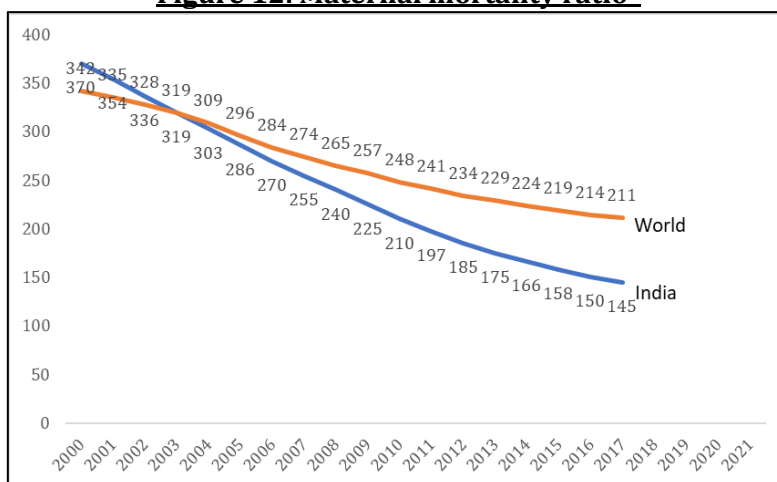
Source: [World Bank](#)

* Sex ratio at birth (male births per female births)

3. Maternal Mortality Rate

Preventing mortality of women in childbirth is another area where India has done extremely well and achieved significantly better progress than the world average (Figure 12).

Figure 12. Maternal mortality ratio*



Source: [World Bank](#)

* Maternal mortality ratio (modelled estimate, per 100,000 live births)

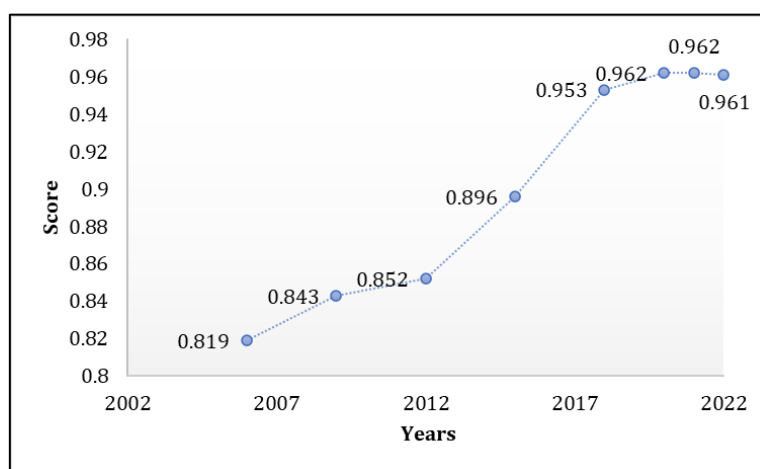
II.7 Gender gaps in education and literacy

1. Index on educational attainment

The [Global Gender Gap Report](#) by the World Economic Forum shows that India has been steadily increasing its educational attainment with a very rapid movement after 2012 (Figure 13). It is very close to the ideal score of 1. However, the growth momentum slowed down after 2018. India experienced a fall in educational attainment in 2022, maybe due to the long-term

adverse effect of the lockdown induced by the COVID-19 pandemic. It ranked 107th place out of 146 countries in 2022 and has been improving its rank.

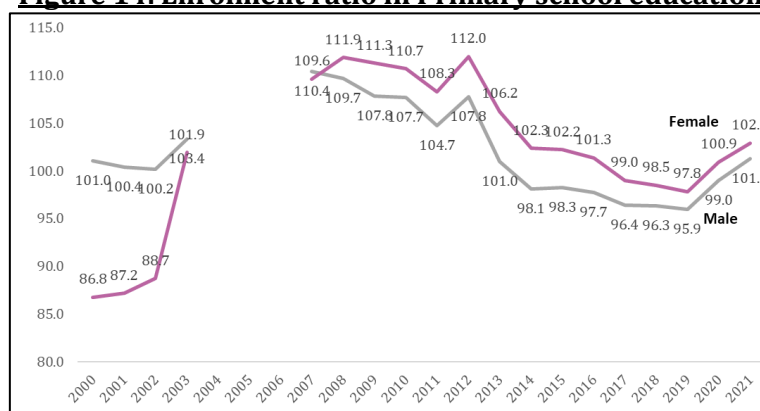
Figure 13. India's score on WEF's Educational Attainment Index



2. Enrolment in Primary Education

Primary education is one parameter where there is, in fact, a reverse gender gap and a larger proportion of men than women are enrolled in school education (Figure 14).

Figure 14. Enrolment ratio in Primary school education

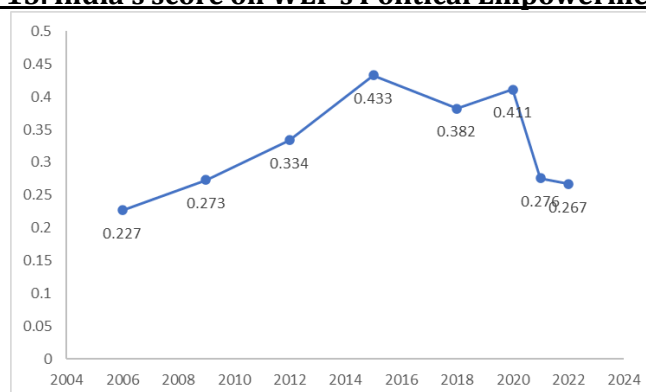


Source: [World Bank](#)

II.8 Gender Gaps in Political empowerment

India has always ranked within the top 50 countries in terms of political empowerment of women given by the [Global Gender Gap Report](#) by the World Economic Forum (Figure 15). It ranked 48th position out of 146 countries in 2022. However, there has been some deterioration in recent years. Though India was steadily improving its score till 2015, it experienced a downfall after that. The recent trends also point to this.

Figure 15. India's score on WEF's Political Empowerment Index



Source: [WEF Gender Gap Reports](#), various years

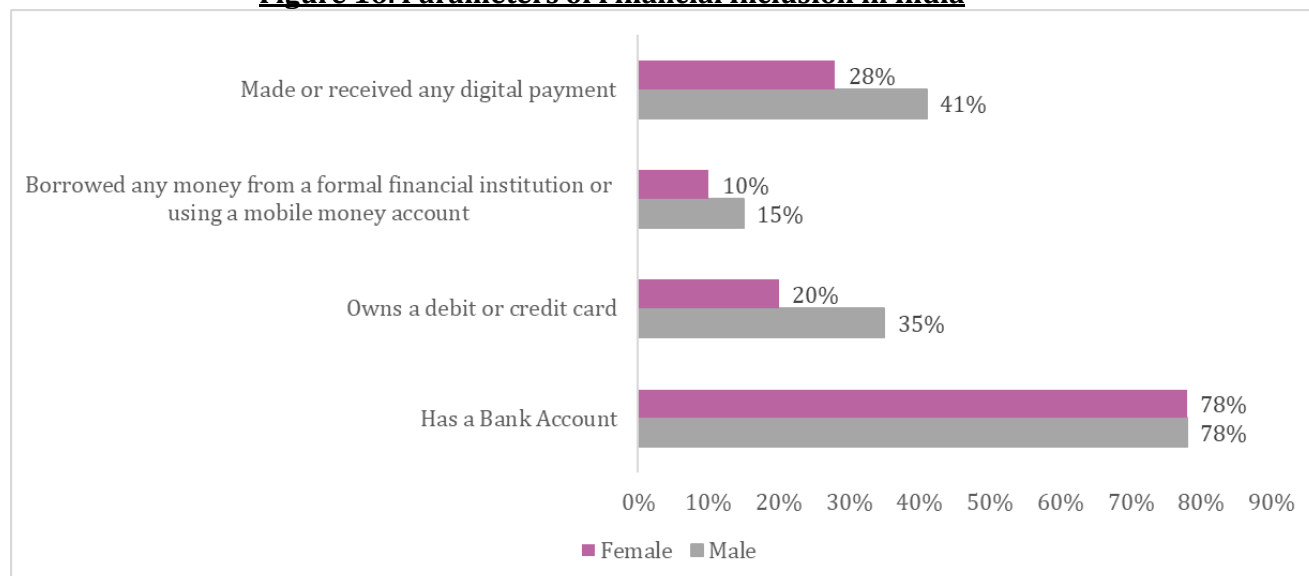
“The world’s most populous democracy, with nearly 690 million women, India remains in the lowest quartile worldwide for women’s representation. Neither the upper nor lower chambers have ever exceeded 15% women.” – [Inter – Parliamentary Union](#)

As per the annual report by [Inter-Parliamentary Union](#), in 2022, India ranked 142 in a list of 193 countries in terms of women’s representation in the lower or single house of parliament – with women making up 12.3% of the Parliament. The [2023 IPU report](#) (which did not have rankings), notes that women accounted for just 33 of 237 members (13.9%) of the indirectly elected Council of States (the upper chamber).

II.8 Gender Gaps in Financial Inclusion

India’s gender gap in account ownership has almost been bridged with 78% of both men and women owning bank accounts. However, there are still large gender gaps in terms of owning credit and debit cards, using digital payments, or borrowing credit (Figure 16).

Figure 16. Parameters of Financial Inclusion in India



Source: [World Bank Findex Database](#)

III. CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS AND WAY FORWARD

It is evident that gender gaps exist in all economic, social, and political spheres of Indian society. While gender gaps are persistent across the globe and in all countries, the comparative statistics shows that India fares more poorly than most other countries.

But one thing that is also visible is that there are a few dimensions in which India has closed the gender gaps, and these are areas where major thrust has been provided by [Government policy measures](#) under its “Women-led Development” Pillar. For instance, closing of the financial inclusion gender gap in account ownership is a result of the Indian Government’s Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojna, where more than 50% of the beneficiaries have been women. The closing of the primary education gender gap is a direct consequence of the Government’s “Beti Bachao Beti Padhao” program. And the stellar performance in reducing maternal mortality is thanks to benefits of various programs for addressing maternal health and women’s nutrition.

These examples demonstrate the impact that large scale, focussed programs and schemes can have on addressing gender barriers. However, given the scale of the problem at hand, addressing all the gaps would require bold moves and coordinated actions not only by the Government but by all stakeholders of society. These actions need to simultaneously address all causes and manifestations of gender inequality, by attacking issues women face through their personal and professional life cycles.

Following is a set of suggested actions -

- 1) **Disable patriarchal mindsets around the girl child** - Indian women are subject to many discriminatory practices from the day they are born. Right from infanticide to prospects of early marriage, women are crushed under the patriarchal norms of society. The root cause of the problem is the backward thinking of society that has been accentuated with time. To address these problems emanating from patriarchal norms and mindsets, there is need to increase awareness amongst people. For instance, foeticide can be reduced by making families aware of the benefits of having a girl child, and how she can support them in their old age. This should be coupled with stringent regulations and increased incentives to have a single girl child.
- 2) **Increase awareness among teenage girls** - When girls enter their teenage years, they are not properly educated about menstrual and other biological issues they face. This results in many girls following unhygienic practices affecting their health and future productivity. Moreover, many of them become undernourished and anaemic. This also impacts their ability to continue their education and the prospects of finding good employment opportunities in future. Policies, therefore, need to be formulated to make iron and other nutrient-rich food available at low cost to the poor and especially women (who are subject to intra-household discrimination). There should also be free or low-cost availability of sanitary pads as well as awareness programs handled by ASHA workers to increase their use.
- 3) **Prevent women from dropping out of education** - The dropout rate from educational institutions among girls is also high, especially in higher education due to early marriage and other stereotypes. For example, there are fewer women in STEM. It is necessary to come up with policies that make women more interested in continuing with their education. To reduce the turnover rate, small improvements can be made in the way things are organized in the workplace and educational institutions, for example, by implementing mentoring programs, designing fun and interactive curricula and telling them more stories of women in different fields so that they can look upon these women as role models. At the same time, schools and colleges should be made more accessible

to women so that the reluctance between girls and their families to send their girl child to distant places will be minimised. Government can also bear the cost of girls' education in poor families to minimise the hesitancy among them to spend resources for their education.

- 4) **Address discrimination at the workplace** - When women enter the workforce, they are subject to so much discrimination that they often feel the need to move out of it. Societal pressures, the motherhood penalty, the glass ceiling etc make them leave or do those jobs that require less commitment. As a result of which, they don't get paid according to their skills. There should be a provision in the workplace to have creches and on-site childcare so that new mothers can work while simultaneously taking care of their children. Government should also come up with schemes that allow the women who went out of the workforce to re-join it with updated skills. Committees should be set up at the company Board levels under the auspices of the government, which look at the matter of sexual harassment cases and ensure the same pay for the same job. The government should also come up with special schemes to impart vocational skills to women so that they can become more independent. Government can also fund companies when women employees take maternity leave so that companies are encouraged to hire more women.
- 5) **Address violence against women** - Women are also subject to a lot of physical harassment like sexual harassment, rapes, and domestic violence. These practices restrict the ability of women to travel, work or live safely. The police force should become more vigilant towards such issues and the insensitivity shown towards women should not be tolerant. At the same time, we need stricter laws that protect the rights of women.
- 6) **Take steps to enhance women's wealth** - Women are also subject to wealth inequality with many women not owning land or other assets. In certain religions, inheritance rights of property are also very discriminatory. There should be a review of such practices and the removal or amendment of patriarchal laws just like the amendment in the Hindu Succession Act in 2005.
- 7) **Increase the representation of women in politics** - to increase the pace of change towards gender equality requires more women in politics who can take decisions keeping in mind the needs of women and not just impose male-centric policies. Passing the 33% reservation Bill in Parliament would be a good start. But the reservation alone will not solve the problem completely, as it requires politics to be made safer. The symbolic presence of women like in the 'panchayatpati' system should be increased to a substantial representation and more efforts should be imparted to ease the political recruitment process of women.

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Ellenomics is on a mission to change the economics of women in India.

On our agenda



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