



Skilling Imperative in India: The Bridge Between Women and Work

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Key Highlights:

An Informal Female Workforce and the Challenge of Skilling

- In 2015, the National Policy for Skill Development set a target to skill **402.87 million adults by 2022**. A daunting challenge as only **4.69%** of India’s total workforce have undergone any formal skills training. In contrast, populations undergoing skills training are: 68% in the UK; 75% in Germany; 52% in the US; 80% in Japan; and 96% in South Korea.
- The NCAER 2018 Report states “**India is trapped in a vicious cycle when it comes to skilling its informal workforce**”.
- According to Labour Bureau data from 2013-14, **only 3.8% of India’s adult women had ever received vocational training** at that time, compared to **9.3% of men**. Furthermore, of these women who did receive vocational training, **39% did not join the labour force** following training.

Sector	Male	Female	Person
Rural + Urban	9.3%	3.8%	6.8%
Rural	8.5%	3.4%	6.2%
Urban	11.3%	4.8%	8.2%

Women’s Participation in Skills Training Programmes

To bridge the gap in skilling, various provisions have been made for women in skilling programmes.

- For instance, **30% seat reservation for women** in ITIs. There are 15,042 such ITIs across the country.
- The flagship programme of MDSE—the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (**PMKVY**) offers **short-term skills training**. Close to **50% of candidates** are women. The PMKVY is in its third phase and has trained **4,830,646 women** as of November 2021.
- The DDU-GKY Program, a **placement-linked skills development programme**, provides for a 33% reservation for women. DDU-GKY has **trained 1,128,301 candidates** so far, and about half the beneficiaries of the programme have been placed in jobs.
- The SANKALP scheme’s **Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP)**, implemented by the Ministry of Women and Child Development trains women to become self-employed or entrepreneurs.
- The **National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme**, links courses under PMKVY and DDU-GKY **with apprenticeship training** to prepare candidates for the job market. The scheme had a **placement record of 44%**.

Scheme	Number of Male Candidates Trained	Number of Female Candidates Trained
Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (data from 2016 to November 2021)	6,437,213	4,830,646
Jan Shikshan Sansthan (data from 2018-19 to 2021-22)	154,359	800,269

National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (data from 2018-19 to 2021-22)	301,556	61,842
Craftsmanship Training Scheme (data from 2018-2021)	3,937,114	530,406
Craft Instructor Training Scheme (data from 2020-21)	3,394	6,111

The Biases in Skilling Programs for Women

- Skills training programs in India have been based on **traditional gender**. Courses for women under PMKVY, for instance, have concentrated on areas like apparel, beauty, wellness, healthcare—**this keeps women out of more remunerative** sectors.
- The National Skill Training Institutes **for women offer only 21 courses**, while the general ITIs, where men predominate, offer 153. Even among the 21, there is a **preponderance of courses in occupations that are either outdated or patently stereotypical** for women, such as secretarial practice, cosmetology, fashion design, or interior design.
- In the general ITIs, female enrolment is still low, though it has grown from **6% in 2014 to 21% in 2018**.
- Only **37% of female enrolments** between 2014-18 were **in the priority sectors** identified by the MSDE—i.e., those expected to generate the maximum jobs in the future.
- Another study asked the respondents “Why they chose the subjects they did?” Their answers repeatedly brought up the perception around “**trades considered suitable for females by society and family.**” Even the **dropout rate for females, at an average of 23%** across ITIs, has been a matter of concern.

	Enrolment in ITIs in Engineering Trades		Enrolment in ITIs in Non-Engineering Trades	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
2014-15	41,902 (94%)	2,549 (6%)	9,850 (91%)	971 (9%)
2015-16	48,036 (92%)	4,070 (8%)	4,758 (36%)	7,806 (64%)
2016-17	49,670 (91%)	4,946 (9%)	5,654 (41%)	8,252 (59%)
2017-18	50,463 (91%)	4,841 (9%)	5,858 (42%)	7,949 (58%)
2018-19	59,602 (90%)	6,496 (10%)	7,469 (40%)	11,218 (60%)

- There are a few **successful initiatives by NGOs** in training women for non-traditional jobs and connecting them to the job market. They include:
 - Azad Foundation’s Women on Wheels, where women are trained in professional driving;
 - the Self-Employed Women’s Association’s (SEWA) Karmika School for Construction Workers in Gujarat;
 - the Archana Women’s Centre in Kerala which trains women in masonry, carpentry, electrical work and plumbing;
 - the Barefoot College International’s Enriche Program in Rajasthan which trains women in digital literacy, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) subjects and sustainable livelihoods like solar technology.

How Family Pressures and Reluctance to Migrate Inhibit Women

- Programmes under ‘Skill India’, launched in 2015, have fallen short of expected outcomes. Despite receiving **over 85% of the entire budgetary** allocation of MSDE, PMKVY has a **poor placement record**; moreover, many candidates are placed in **poor quality jobs** in the informal sector. Out of 348,000 candidates trained under PMKVY in 2020-21, **only 16,321 were placed** in jobs, according to the 2022 Economic Survey.

- A study by the International Growth Centre tracked female participants in Odisha who had completed training under DDUGKY and identified **two crucial factors** inhibiting women from taking up and keeping jobs: most reported reason being that their **families did not give them permission**. Subsequently too, women who dropped out did so **mainly due to family pressure**, while men quit their jobs due to job-related discontent.
- Women also reported a **reluctance to migrate**. While **female trainees were less likely both to receive job offers and accept them**, the chances of them doing so was even lower if the jobs required them to move out of their place of residence.

Digitisation and Automation: Women Could Be Left Out of the Future of Work

- The pandemic has amplified the gendered digital divide. Indian women **are 15% less likely than men to own a mobile phone**, and **33% less likely to use mobile internet services**.
- **Public-private partnerships** could be the way forward for inclusive digital skilling, especially for women. There are a few programs already underway. Microsoft and the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), in a public-private partnership, train more than **100,000 underserved women in digital skills**. Among them, 20,000 women are from regions with the lowest female labour force participation rates.
- SAP India and Microsoft have launched a joint skilling program, **TechSaksham**, for 62,000 female students from underserved communities, to train them for tech-related careers. In the first year, **the initiative will train 1,500 teachers**, and each of them will be equipped to **support over 40-50 students a year**, in turn **impacting 60,000 to 75,000** students. These **programs have taken off** in the last two years, despite the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic showing both: the extent of the challenge and the potential for participatory transition.

Read more: [Skilling Imperative in India: The Bridge Between Women and Work - ORF](#)

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