

THE MISSING WOMEN

Relevant for: Indian Economy | Topic: Issues Related to Poverty, Inclusion, Employment & Sustainable Development

India's employment generation in the last five years has remained weak. According to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) India Index Baseline Report by NITI Aayog, 64 per 1,000 persons appear to be unemployed in the working age group of 15-59. The problem of unemployment has become more acute for youth and women. According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) report of 2016, youth are three times as likely as adults to be unemployed.

The paradox of job growth

Yet, unemployment rate does not sufficiently measure labour market inefficiencies, as it does not consider those who are not in the labour force. Sustainable Development Goal 8 speaks of full and productive employment and economic growth; target 8.6 mentions that by 2020 there should be a substantial reduction in the proportion of youth in the category of Not in Education, Employment and Training. As per ILO estimates, 27.5% in India are in this category, of which 8% are men and 49.3% are women.

The narratives on the missing half of the female population vary. One is that the majority of women work under the category of "housewives". Unfortunately, in India's economy, neither their contribution nor their presence gets counted in the GDP. Another is that women have a low enrolment rate in secondary and higher education. Those not in education, employment and training in the age groups 15-19, 20-24, and 25-29 comprise 13.48%, 31.80% and 35.33%, respectively. If we look at the figures gender-wise, the age group 15-19 consists of 5.37% men and 23.04% women, the age group 20-24 consists of 8.32% men and 56.13% women, and the age group 25-29 consists of 7.13% men and 64% women in this category. The percentage of men not in education, employment and training in all three age groups does not vary much.

A misleading story of job creation

To date, most discussions on this subject get stuck on questions of unemployment and labour force participation. Only if the causes and consequences of not being in education, employment and training are understood will affirmative actions follow. For example, to promote girls' education, the major schemes which function at the pan-India level are Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao and Sukanya Samridhi Yojana. While the efficacy of these schemes is a matter of debate, it is the focus on recognising the contributions of the youth, particularly the younger cohort of women, that matters from a policy perspective. If the problem is thus analysed correctly and appropriate policy actions are taken, this could pave the way for genuine progress towards Sustainable Development Goals. That matters considerably because, after all, today's youth will be the adults of tomorrow.

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