



DAILY EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

TOPIC

**VIEW INDIA'S GENDER GAP
REPORT RANKING AS A WARNING**

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In Context

- Despite its emergence as a global economic force and digital innovator, India continues to face serious challenges in gender equality, as highlighted by the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report (2025).
- India ranks 131 out of 148 countries, with particularly low scores in economic participation and health and survival—critical pillars for achieving gender parity.

Key Structural Issues

- **Health and Survival:**
 - ♦ **Sex Ratio at Birth:** India's sex ratio at birth remains among the most skewed globally, reflecting a persistent societal preference for sons.
 - ♦ **Healthy Life Expectancy:** Women now have a lower healthy life expectancy than men, a reversal of the expected trend.
 - ♦ **Anaemia Prevalence:** Nearly 57% of Indian women aged 15–49 are anaemic (NFHS-5), severely impacting their ability to learn, work, and carry pregnancies safely.
 - ♦ **Neglect of Women's Health:** Chronic underinvestment in reproductive health, preventive care, and nutrition—especially for rural and low-income women—undermines national progress.
- **Economic Participation and Opportunity**
 - ♦ **Low Labour Force Participation:** India ranks 143rd on the Economic Participation and Opportunity subindex. Female labour force participation remains stubbornly low.
 - ♦ **Wage Gap:** Women earn less than a third of what men do.
 - ♦ **Lost Economic Potential:** Closing the gender gap could have added \$770 billion to India's GDP by 2025, but the opportunity has not been realized.
 - ♦ **Slow Progress:** At the current rate, it may take over a century to close the global economic gender gap, with India lagging behind even this slow trajectory.
- **The Burden of Unpaid Care Work**
 - ♦ **Invisible Labour:** Indian women perform nearly seven times more unpaid domestic work than men (Time Use Survey), yet this work remains invisible in national accounting and is underfunded in public policy.
 - ♦ **Underrepresentation:** Women are grossly underrepresented in decision-making spaces, from boardrooms to budget committees, leading to policies that often overlook women's lived realities.

Demographic Shifts: The Ageing Challenge

- **Rising Elderly Population:** By 2050, senior citizens are expected to make up nearly 20% of India's population, with a significant proportion being very old women, especially widows.
- **Dependency Ratio:** If women continue to be excluded from the workforce, the dependency ratio will rise, straining the economy and fiscal stability.
- **Economic Necessity:** Gender equality is not just a rights issue—it is a demographic and economic imperative for sustaining growth as the population ages and fertility rates decline.

Policy Gaps and Recommendations

- **Care Infrastructure:**
 - ♦ **Invest in Care Services:** Building childcare centres, elder care services, and expanding maternity benefits would ease the unpaid work burden and enable millions of women to join or re-enter the workforce.

- ♦ **Learning from Global Models:** Countries like Uruguay and South Korea have successfully integrated care economies into their development plans, offering valuable lessons for India.
- **Recognition and Redistribution**
 - ♦ **Policy Integration:** Central and State governments must account for unpaid care work through time-use surveys, gender budgeting, and direct investment in care infrastructure.
- **Health and Social Protection**
 - ♦ **Budget Prioritization:** Increased allocations for women's health, especially at the primary care level, are essential for improving well-being and economic inclusion.
 - ♦ **Integrated Policies:** Connecting health, labour, and social protection policies is crucial for reversing negative trends.
- **Other approaches** are to expand access to education and skill training, boost economic participation, improve health and safety, enhance political and legal empowerment, leverage technology and financial inclusion, engage communities and shift cultural norms.

Conclusion

India's frameworks and ambitions for gender equality exist, but real investment is needed in:

- Public health systems that prioritize women's needs
- Care services that redistribute unpaid work
- Policies that empower women as active builders of the economy

Related Initiatives & Efforts

- **Economic Empowerment:**
 - ♦ **Stand-Up India:** Supports women entrepreneurs with bank loans between 10 lakh and 1 crore.
 - ♦ **Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY):** Offers microfinance to women-led businesses; 68% of loans have gone to women.
 - ♦ **Mahila e-Haat:** An online platform for women entrepreneurs to market products directly.
 - ♦ **Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK):** Provides micro-credit to poor women for income-generating activities.
- **Education & Skill Development:**
 - ♦ **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP):** Promotes girl child education and combats gender-biased sex selection.
 - ♦ **Samagra Shiksha & Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas:** Focus on inclusive education and residential schooling for girls in backward areas.
 - ♦ **Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY):** Offers skill training to women for better employment prospects.
- **Health & Nutrition:**
 - ♦ **Mission Saksham Anganwadi & Poshan 2.0:** Provides nutrition and health services to women and children through Anganwadi centers.
 - ♦ **Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY):** Offers maternity benefits to pregnant and lactating mothers.
 - ♦ **Ujjwala Yojana:** Distributes free LPG connections to reduce health risks from indoor pollution.
- **Political Empowerment:**
 - ♦ **33% Reservation in Panchayati Raj Institutions:** Ensures women's representation at the grassroots level.
 - ♦ **Women's Reservation Bill** [aka Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Eighth Amendment) Bill, 2023]: Mandates 33% reservation in Parliament and State legislatures starting 2029.

- **Safety & Legal Support:**
 - ♦ **Mission Shakti:** Umbrella scheme for women's safety and empowerment, including **One Stop Centres and Women Helpline**.
 - ♦ **Nari Adalat:** Community-level grievance redressal for women.
 - ♦ **Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017:** Extends maternity leave to 26 weeks and mandates crèche facilities.

Source: TH

Mains Practice Question

[Q] In what ways does India's ranking in the recent Gender Gap Report reflect deeper socio-cultural and policy challenges?

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