



KAMARAJ IAS ACADEMY
Only IAS Academy by Grandson of "Perunthalsivam Kamarajar"

Global Gender Gap 2026: India Retains 131st Rank Despite Gains in Education and Health

Published On: 19-09-2026

Recent Developments:

- The **World Economic Forum (WEF)** released the **Global Gender Gap Report 2026** on 16 September 2026, marking the **20th edition** of the index, which has tracked gender parity since 2006 across 145 economies.
- India retained its **131st position** with an overall gender parity score of **64.5%**, improving by **4.3 percentage points since 2006**, although it remains below the global average of **69.2%**.
- India performs strongly in **Educational Attainment (96.6%)** and **Health and Survival (95.6%)**, but its **Economic Participation and Opportunity score remains only 41.2%**, indicating persistent structural barriers to women's economic participation.
- Globally, **69.2% of the gender gap has been closed**, but at the current rate of progress, complete parity is estimated to remain approximately **120 years away**. No economy achieved complete gender parity in 2026.

Understanding the Global Gender Gap Index:

Purpose and Methodology:

- The **Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI)** is an annual benchmarking framework developed by the **World Economic Forum in 2006** to measure the relative position of women and men across key socioeconomic and political dimensions.
- The index measures the **gap between women and men rather than the absolute level of development**, allowing economies with different income levels to be compared on gender parity.
- Scores range from **0 to 100**, with 100 representing complete parity; the index covers four dimensions: **Economic Participation and Opportunity, Educational Attainment, Health and Survival, and Political Empowerment**.
- The 2026 edition covers **145 economies** and also uses a constant sample of 97 economies to examine long-term trends consistently across the 20-year period.

Four Dimensions of the Index:

- **Economic Participation and Opportunity:** Measures gender gaps in labour-force participation, estimated earned income, wage equality and representation in professional, managerial and senior positions.
- **Educational Attainment:** Measures parity in literacy and enrolment across primary, secondary and tertiary education.
- **Health and Survival:** Measures indicators including the sex ratio at birth and healthy life expectancy.
- **Political Empowerment:** Measures gender representation in parliament, ministerial positions and heads-of-state positions over the relevant historical period.

India's Performance in Global Gender Gap Report 2026:

Kamaraj IAS Academy

Plot A P.127, AF block, 6 th street, 11th Main Rd, Shanthi Colony, Anna Nagar, Chennai, Tamil Nadu 600040

Phone: **044 4353 9988 / 98403 94477 / Whatsapp : 09710729833**

Overall Gender Parity:

- India recorded an overall gender parity score of **64.5%**, placing it **131st among 145 economies**. Its score has improved by **4.3 percentage points since 2006**, with much of the long-term improvement concentrated in educational attainment.
- The score should be interpreted as the **share of the gender gap that has been closed**, rather than as a direct measure of women's overall socioeconomic status.

Economic Participation and Opportunity:

- India recorded a **41.2% parity score**, making economic participation one of its principal areas of gender disparity. The score improved by 0.5 percentage points over the previous edition but remains below India's 2013 level of 44.6%.
- Parity among **professional and technical workers** increased substantially from 26.6% in 2006 to **49.9% in 2026**, indicating significant progress in women's representation in skilled occupations.
- However, parity among **legislators, senior officials and managers** remains only **13.1%**, highlighting the continuing leadership gap.
- Labour-force participation parity has also improved only modestly over the long term, reaching **44.1% in 2026**.

Educational Attainment:

- India achieved a **96.6% parity score** in educational attainment, making education one of the country's strongest dimensions.
- India maintained **full parity in secondary and tertiary enrolment**, while primary enrolment also remained close to parity.
- Adult literacy parity stood at **82.5%**, although it declined slightly year-on-year; nevertheless, the indicator has improved substantially since 2006.
- The contrast between high educational parity and weaker economic participation indicates that **educational access alone does not automatically translate into equal labour-market outcomes**.

Health and Survival:

- India recorded **95.6% parity** in health and survival, continuing the improvement observed in recent years.
- However, the **sex ratio at birth** remains weaker than its 2006 level, indicating that demographic gender discrimination continues to require policy attention.

Political Empowerment:

- Political Empowerment was India's **highest-ranked subindex**, with a parity score of **24.5%** and a global subindex rank of 67th.
- India's parliamentary parity score stood at **16.1%**, representing a 7-percentage-point improvement since 2006.
- At the ministerial level, parity stood at only **5.9%**, despite reaching 30% in 2019, demonstrating that gains in political representation have not been uniform across levels of decision-making.

Global Findings and Emerging Trends:

Global Gender Parity:

- The global gender gap reached **69.2% closed in 2026**, an improvement of 0.4 percentage points over the comparable previous-year cohort.
- **Iceland** retained the top position, followed by **Finland and Norway**, while **Chad** occupied the lowest position among the 145 economies covered.

- Despite two decades of gradual improvement, the WEF estimates that complete global parity remains around **120 years away** at the current pace.

Leadership and AI Gender Gap:

- Women accounted for only **19.1% of CEO positions globally**, illustrating the persistence of the leadership gap even where women's participation in professional occupations has increased.
- Women constitute **fewer than one in five AI engineers globally**, making gender representation in emerging technologies an important new frontier of gender equality.
- The emerging challenge is therefore shifting from merely ensuring access to education and employment towards ensuring women's representation in **high-value occupations, leadership positions, capital allocation and technology-intensive sectors**.

Major Challenges to Gender Parity in India:

Low and Unequal Labour-Market Participation:

- Women's participation in paid employment remains constrained by **care responsibilities, occupational segregation, social norms, safety concerns and limited access to suitable employment opportunities**.
- Recent official labour-force data also indicate a continuing rise in female labour-force participation, but participation levels and the quality of employment vary substantially between rural and urban areas.
- Policy therefore needs to distinguish between a numerical rise in labour-force participation and **sustained access to productive, formal and adequately remunerated employment**.

Unpaid Care Work and the Motherhood Penalty:

- Women continue to bear a disproportionate share of **unpaid domestic and care work**, which reduces their time available for paid employment, education and skill development.
- Career interruptions associated with childbirth and caregiving can reduce women's earnings, professional advancement and access to leadership positions.
- Expanding **childcare, eldercare, parental leave and basic household infrastructure** can therefore contribute directly to women's economic participation.

Safety, Mobility and Infrastructure:

- Concerns relating to **gender-based violence, inadequate public transport, poor street lighting and unsafe workplaces** can restrict women's mobility and narrow the geographical area within which they can pursue education or employment.
- Safe and reliable transport infrastructure should consequently be treated as an **economic-enablement measure**, not merely as a law-and-order intervention.

Digital and Technological Divide:

- Unequal access to **smartphones, internet connectivity, digital skills and emerging technologies** can exclude women from financial services, online education, digital entrepreneurship and technology-intensive employment.
- The growing importance of AI makes women's participation in **STEM education, AI engineering and technology leadership** increasingly important for future economic competitiveness.

Political Representation and Effective Agency:

- Formal representation does not automatically guarantee effective decision-making power.

- At the grassroots level, constitutional reservations have expanded women's representation in local government, but concerns about **proxy participation and patriarchal control** can weaken substantive political agency.
- Effective participation therefore requires leadership training, institutional support, financial autonomy and greater social acceptance of women in decision-making roles.

Intersectional Disadvantages:

- Gender inequality can be intensified by **caste, tribal status, poverty, disability, geographical isolation and other socioeconomic disadvantages**.
- A universal gender policy therefore needs to be complemented by targeted interventions for women facing multiple forms of exclusion, particularly in access to land, credit, skills, employment and public services.

Health, Nutrition and Reproductive Autonomy:

- **Anaemia, malnutrition, inadequate menstrual-health infrastructure and limited access to reproductive healthcare** can affect women's educational continuity, productivity and long-term economic participation.
- Improving nutrition and reproductive healthcare should therefore be integrated with education, employment and social-protection policies rather than treated as isolated welfare measures.

Government and Policy Measures:

Gender-Responsive Budgeting:

- **Gender-Responsive Budgeting (GRB)** can connect public expenditure with measurable improvements in women's education, health, employment, safety and economic participation.
- The Union Budget 2026–27 continues to present a dedicated **Gender Budget Statement**, categorising provisions according to their expected benefit to women and girls.
- The policy priority should increasingly shift from merely reporting allocations towards **outcome-based monitoring**, including employment generated, women reached, assets created and improvements in service access.

Care Economy and Social Infrastructure:

- Investment in **crèches, childcare, eldercare, drinking water, sanitation and public transport** can reduce the unpaid-care burden and release women's time for productive activities.
- Such investment can simultaneously improve employment generation, human capital formation and women's labour-force participation.

Women's Economic Empowerment:

- Greater access to **formal credit, financial literacy, digital payments, entrepreneurship programmes, markets and property ownership** can strengthen women's economic autonomy.
- Schemes such as **Stand-Up India** can support women entrepreneurs by improving access to institutional credit for greenfield enterprises.

Education-to-Employment Transition:

- The policy focus needs to move from achieving enrolment parity towards ensuring **skill acquisition, employability, apprenticeships, career continuity and leadership opportunities**.
- Greater participation of women in **STEM, AI, manufacturing, digital services and high-productivity sectors** can help narrow the economic gender gap.

Political Empowerment:

Kamaraj IAS Academy

Plot A P.127, AF block, 6 th street, 11th Main Rd, Shanthi Colony, Anna Nagar, Chennai, Tamil Nadu 600040

Phone: **044 4353 9988 / 98403 94477 / Whatsapp : 09710729833**

- The **Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, 2023** provides a constitutional framework for reservation of seats for women in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies, subject to the conditions specified in the constitutional amendments.
- Effective political empowerment also requires capacity building, access to political finance, leadership opportunities and institutional support so that representation translates into substantive participation.

Way Forward:

From Parity in Access to Parity in Outcomes:

- India's high educational parity demonstrates that **access has improved considerably**, but the comparatively low economic and leadership scores show that the next challenge is converting educational gains into **employment, income, ownership and decision-making power**.
- Policy should therefore follow a lifecycle approach covering **education, skills, employment, childcare, health, finance, leadership and social security**.

Adopt the 3R Framework for Care Work:

- **Recognise** unpaid care work through better data and policy visibility, **Reduce** the burden through public infrastructure and affordable care services, and **Redistribute** responsibilities between households, employers and the state.
- Greater emphasis on shared parental responsibilities can also reduce incentives for employers to perceive women as disproportionately costly because of caregiving responsibilities.

Build a Gender-Responsive Digital Economy:

- Expand women's access to **devices, affordable internet, digital literacy, STEM education, AI skills and technology entrepreneurship**, particularly among rural and economically disadvantaged groups.
- Women's representation should be improved not only among technology users but also among **engineers, researchers, entrepreneurs and decision-makers**.

Strengthen Outcome-Based Governance:

- Gender programmes should be assessed through measurable indicators such as **female labour-force participation, wage and income parity, leadership representation, access to credit, safety, childcare availability and digital inclusion**.
- Convergence among ministries dealing with **women and child development, labour, education, skill development, health, finance and rural development** can reduce fragmentation.

UPSC Perspective:

Essay and Ethics:

- Gender parity can be approached through **human capital, distributive justice, substantive equality, capability enhancement and inclusive development**.
- The central policy question is not merely whether women have access to institutions, but whether they possess the **capability, autonomy and agency to participate meaningfully** in economic, social and political life.

Value Addition for UPSC:

Key Data Points:

Kamaraj IAS Academy

Plot A P.127, AF block, 6 th street, 11th Main Rd, Shanthi Colony, Anna Nagar, Chennai, Tamil Nadu 600040

Phone: **044 4353 9988 / 98403 94477** / Whatsapp : **09710729833**

- **India's GGGI 2026 Rank:** 131st out of 145.
- **India's Overall Gender Parity:** 64.5%.
- **India's Economic Participation and Opportunity:** 41.2%.
- **India's Educational Attainment:** 96.6%.
- **India's Health and Survival:** 95.6%.
- **India's Political Empowerment:** 24.5%.
- **Global Gender Gap Closed:** 69.2%.
- **Estimated Time to Global Parity:** Approximately 120 years.
- **Women among Global CEOs:** 19.1%.
- **Women among Global AI Engineers:** Fewer than one in five.

Constitutional and SDG Linkages:

- **Article 14:** Equality before law and equal protection of laws.
- **Article 15:** Prohibition of discrimination and scope for affirmative action.
- **Article 16:** Equality of opportunity in public employment.
- **Article 39(a):** Equal right to adequate means of livelihood.
- **Article 39(d):** Equal pay for equal work.
- **Article 42:** Just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief.
- **Article 51A(e):** Promotion of harmony and renunciation of practices derogatory to the dignity of women.
- **SDG 5:** Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

Mains-Ready Conclusion:

- India's experience demonstrates that **gender parity is not achieved merely by expanding access to education or formal representation.**
- The persistence of economic, leadership, care and technology gaps shows the need to convert formal equality into substantive equality.
- A combination of **care infrastructure, safe mobility, quality employment, digital inclusion, financial empowerment, political agency and outcome-based gender budgeting** can enable women to contribute more fully to India's human capital and inclusive development.
- Closing the gender gap is therefore both a **social-justice imperative and a development strategy** for achieving the objectives of **Viksit Bharat 2047**.