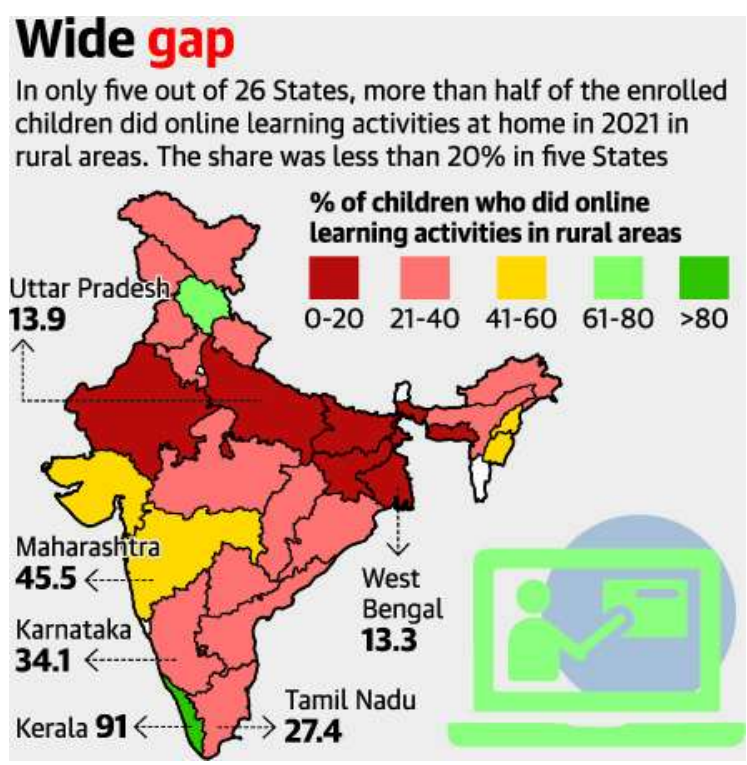


Current Affairs of the Day

‘School enrolment fell during pandemic’

1. The percentage of rural children who were not enrolled in school doubled during the pandemic, with government schools seeing an increase in enrolment at the expense of private schools, according to the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), 2021.
2. However, enrolment does not necessarily mean that learning took place. In a survey of over 76,000 households with children aged six to 14, ASER found that while 92% of children had textbooks for their grade, only a third had access to any other learning resources or support.
3. With smartphone availability and access limited, online learning was restricted to a quarter of students, though there were major differences in the experience of students from different States.
4. For instance, 91% of students from Kerala and almost 80% from Himachal Pradesh had online education, but only 10% from Bihar and 13% from West Bengal.



Major shift

1. In 2018, only 2.5% of children were not enrolled in school. In both the 2020 and 2021 surveys, that figure had jumped to 4.6%. Government school enrolment spiked significantly from 64.3% in 2018 to 70.3% in 2021, while private school enrolment dropped from 32.5% to 24.4% over the same period.



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2. The shift to government school enrolment could be a result of financial distress, the closure of affordable private schools and the movement of migrants to rural areas.
3. Although it is not clear if this is a permanent phenomenon or will be reversed post the pandemic, it is important to ensure that government schools and teachers are equipped and given the necessary resources for this surge in enrolment.
4. The habit of going to school, sitting in a classroom, and teaching in a classroom has been disrupted significantly. We need to ask if this disruption can be repaired simply by reopening schools.

'All closed doors of the military are being opened for women'

1. About two lakh girls from across the country have appeared in the admission test of the National Defence Academy (NDA), all closed doors in the military are now being opened for women and there is increased participation of women in all three Services.

EMPOWERING WOMEN IN UNIFORM

Permanent Commission for Women Officers in Indian Armed Forces

<p>PM Modi's announcement on 15th Aug. 2018 for Permanent Commission for Women Officers in Indian Armed Forces fulfilled</p>	<p>Indian Navy to start inducting women officers in all branches, at par with male officers</p>
<p>All branches in Indian Air Force including Fighter Pilots now opened for Women officers</p>	<p>Women Officers in all 10 branches in Indian Army to be granted Permanent Commission</p>

2. Terming the recent decision of the Army to grant Permanent Commission to eligible women officers as a great example of women's empowerment, in addition to opening the NDA for women, girls are also now being given admission in Sainik Schools.
3. Circumstances had changed and women's participation has increased in all the police and paramilitary forces.



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India to hold first 2+2 with Russia on December 6

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh are likely to hold their first “2+2” format talks with their Russian counterparts, along with Russian President Vladimir Putin, who is expected to meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the annual summit.

1. The 2+2 format is particularly significant, given that India conducts joint foreign and defence ministerial only with its closest ‘Quad’ partners — the U.S., Japan and Australia.
2. According to officials privy to the planning of the intensive India-Russia exchanges, a number of agreements on defence, science and technology and trade are expected to be announced.
3. The most closely watched will be defence agreements that could be launched, given considerable heat in Washington already over India’s purchase of the \$5.43-billion S-400 air defence system.
4. A “fundamental change” in the defence relationship since 2018 has taken bilateral contracts from \$2-3 billion per year to \$9-10 billion, making Russia India’s “top defence partner”.
5. Two major defence deals awaiting conclusion are the AK-203 assault rifles and the Iglu-S very short-range air defence systems. However, the deal for Ka-226T light utility helicopters, announced by the two leaders earlier, is unlikely to see the conclusion.
6. India and Russia are expected to sign the Reciprocal Exchange of Logistics Support Agreement and a Navy-to-Navy cooperation MoU.

Cleaning the NCR’s air will require a far greater sense of purpose and political will

Addressing pollution in NCR will require synergy between departments, across states, not just emergency measures

Adhocism:

1. The measures announced by the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) to curb the deteriorating air quality in the National Capital Region (NCR) evoke a sense of déjà vu.
2. The commission has given directions to close all educational institutions till further notice, ban all construction work, and work from home for 50 per cent of government staff till November 21.



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3. Such adhocism was the stock-in-trade of the CAQM's predecessor, the Supreme Court-appointed Environment Pollution (Prevention and Control) Authority, in the past five years.

4. The new agency, instituted by the Commission for Air Quality Management in

National Capital Region and Adjoining Areas Act in August — it was earlier notified by two ordinances in October last year and April 2021 — is mandated to frame a “holistic approach” to the NCR’s perennial problem.

5. It took a rap from the Supreme Court for it to initiate emergency measures. But it’s clear that cleaning the NCR’s air will require a far greater sense of purpose and political will.

Long term solutions:

1. Air pollution in the capital and its vicinity points to a complex interplay of lifestyle choices of the region’s residents — particulate matter from tailpipes of the large fleet of personal vehicles combine with agricultural practices in the neighbourhood, industrial and construction activities and wind speeds.
2. In the past, the problem got compounded because the Central Pollution Control Board, EPCA, transport departments and state-level pollution management agencies would work in silos, and often at cross-purposes.
3. Delhi, Haryana and Punjab were at constant loggerheads on the issue of stubble burning.
4. The CAQM was envisaged as a corrective to this state of affairs. But the new agency does not seem to have improved matters.
5. Instead, another avoidable controversy on the contribution of farm fires to the NCR’s smog has been stoked as a result of the government citing figures in the apex court that are at odds with its own data.

NEW BOSS TO FIGHT BAD AIR

BEFORE CENTRAL BODY, WHO?
EPCA
 ▶ Supreme Court-backed Environment Pollution (Prevention and Control) Authority on the job since 1986
 ▶ Mandated to protect and improve quality of environment
 ▶ Assisted SC in matters related to noise pollution, hazardous waste, etc, too
 ▶ Drew power from the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, and implemented various mitigation measures through CPCII

OTHERS
 ▶ Several committees and task forces - both at Centre and NCR states - dealt with air pollution
 ▶ Union environment ministry worked as a coordination body
 ▶ High-level task force, led by principal secretary to PM, reviewed action taken

EPCA and all such committees now stand dissolved with the ordinance
 The issue will now be handled by a powerful statutory authority - Commission For Air Quality Management in NCR and Adjoining Areas

COMMISSION TO ADDRESS THREE BROAD ISSUES
 Monitoring of air pollution
 Enforcement of laws after such monitoring
 Research and innovation

COMMISSION TO HAVE CHAIRPERSON PLUS 17 MEMBERS
 Key Functions | Take mitigation measures through central/state agencies

Entertain complaints for protecting and improving air quality	Regulate or prohibit activities that may cause or increase air pollution	Lay down parameters for air quality and for emissions or discharge of pollutants	Restrict industrial operation that may cause air pollution
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PCB AND SPCCS WILL CONTINUE TO DEAL WITH AIR POLLUTION. HOWEVER, THE COMMISSION'S ORDERS PREVAIL IN CASE OF CONFLICT

PENALTY PROVISIONS
 ▶ Non-compliance punishable with a jail term up to 5 years or fine up to Rs 1 crore, or both
 ▶ Appeal can be made only before NGT

DIRECT CLOSURE OF POLLUTING INDUSTRIES **STOP OR REGULATE SUPPLY OF WATER OR ELECTRICITY TO IRVING INDUSTRIES**



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6. While the spell of “severe” air lasts a few weeks after Diwali, people in the NCR continue to breathe “poor” or “very poor” air almost all winter.

Cleaning this baseline pollution will require technological interventions, investments in public transport – especially in the DTC’s ageing fleet – as well as motivating

people to make behavioural changes. The CAQM would do well to coordinate such efforts, and not rely solely on emergency measures.

DAYS NUMBERED FOR AGENTS OF POLLUTION

WITHIN 30 DAYS Introduce intelligent traffic systems for lane-driving Introduce wet/mechanized vacuum sweeping of roads Ensure strict action against unauthorized brick kilns Evolve a system of reporting of garbage/municipal solid waste burning through mobile-based applications and other social media platform linked with Central and state-level control rooms Ensure carriage of construction material in closed/covered vessels	IMMEDIATE Strict action against visibly polluting vehicles Install weight-in-motion bridges at Delhi borders to prevent overloading Take steps to prevent parking of vehicles in the non-designated areas	Introduce early alarm system about traffic congestion on major routes Consider introducing plan for flexi/staggered timings to minimize peak movement of vehicles on the road	De-congest pathways Take stringent action against open burning of biomass/leaves/tyres, etc and submit periodic status reports Take steps for retrofitting of diesel vehicles with particulate filters	Control dust pollution at construction sites through appropriate cover Set-up helpline in states/UTs for taking action against reported non-compliance
WITHIN 60 DAYS Take steps to expedite early completion of western and eastern peripheral expressways and submit completion schedule Maintain traffic-free roads for free-flow of traffic to reduce emissions and dust	WITHIN 90 DAYS Take steps for installation of remote sensor based PUC system Prohibit use of coal in hotels and restaurants and eliminate use of kerosene for cooking in Delhi	Take steps for installation of remote sensor based PUC system Promote battery-operated vehicles Take steps for maximizing coverage of LPG/PNG for domestic cooking purposes with intention of achieving 100%	WITHIN 120 DAYS Launch action plan for switching over to natural gas by industries, when-over feasible Take steps for blacktopping/pavement of road shoulders to avoid dust	WITHIN A YEAR Take steps for setting up of biomass-based power generation units to avoid biomass burning

Govt must identify the risks & frame a regulatory framework for cryptocurrencies that addresses them

Considering the nature of cryptocurrencies, restrictions on such transactions may end up having the opposite effect, pushing them beyond the realm of scrutiny and making it harder to enforce the law

Crypto Concerns:

1. RBI Governor once again raised concerns over cryptocurrencies. There are serious concerns about macro-economic and financial stability.
2. While the central bank is right to advise caution, an outright ban, even if enforceable, is not a prudent way forward.
3. Considering the nature of cryptocurrencies, restrictions on such transactions may end up having the opposite effect, pushing them beyond the realm of scrutiny and making it harder to enforce the law.

CRYPTO CALL

What's happening around the world

CHINA | The People's Bank of China is piloting its own digital currency

SOUTH KOREA | In March 2020, the country came up with laws to regulate crypto exchanges

USA | It has been open to crypto. In fact, the country's largest digital currency exchange, Coinbase, has also filed for an IPO

SWITZERLAND | Cryptocurrencies are legal and it is one of the preferred choice for Blockchain companies

COS, TOP HONCHOS TOO BETTING ON CRYPTO

- Tesla bought \$1.5 billion worth of Bitcoin and will also accept it as a form of payment for its products
- Mastercard too will allow transactions in certain cryptocurrencies this year on its network



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Global confusion:

1. Globally, there does not appear to be uniformity in the regulatory approach towards cryptocurrencies. Countries are grappling with questions over the appropriate regulatory framework, and are opting for different approaches.
2. For instance, on the one hand, El Salvador has permitted Bitcoin as legal tender, while on the other, China has imposed a blanket ban on all crypto transactions and mining.
3. In India, the RBI had barred all banks from dealing in cryptocurrencies in 2018 but this was struck down by the Supreme Court in 2020. However, even as the central bank has voiced its concerns, the underlying blockchain technology does find support.

Cryptocurrencies: An asset or a commodity

1. Much depends on how a country views cryptocurrency — as a currency, an asset or a commodity? How it is classified will in turn determine the regulatory architecture, and thus the tax treatment.
2. There are indications that the Indian government is likely to introduce a Bill on cryptocurrencies in the winter session of Parliament.
3. Reports also suggest that the government could classify crypto exchanges as e-commerce platforms. But doing so would also raise questions about who would be the appropriate regulator.

One Step Forward



Cryptos will be treated as asset/ commodity for all purposes & as per user case – payments, investment or utility

This would be 1st time cryptos will be categorised as **per technology** they use



Govt focus to be based on **end use** of asset for regulatory purposes



Only cryptocurrencies that are **covered under govt's decision** will be allowed to be traded in India

Concerns over cryptocurrencies

1. There are legitimate concerns over cryptocurrencies. They stem from the fact that there is no underlying asset, no benchmark to assess their values against. Moreover, they are extremely volatile in nature.

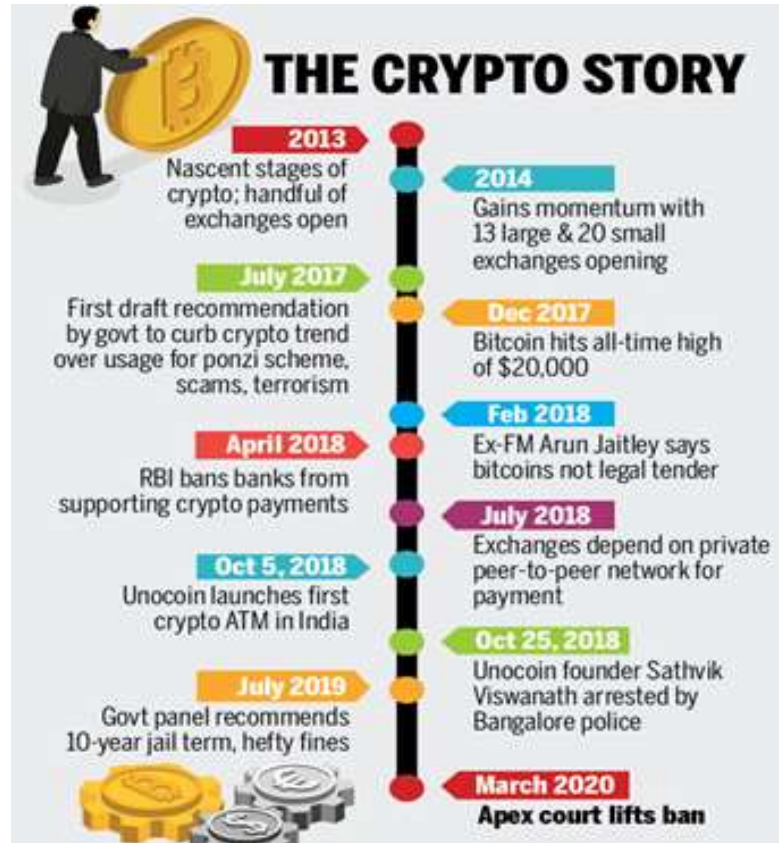


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2. Considering the dramatic rise in investor interest in such currencies — non-fungible tokens are increasingly gaining traction — concerns over investor protection also need to be addressed.
3. While sophisticated investors may not need guidance, retail investors — according to the RBI governor, 80 per cent of crypto accounts are small accounts of Rs 1,000 and Rs 2,000 — need to be cautioned about cryptocurrencies and the volatility associated with them.
4. Issues of money laundering and financing of terrorism need to be grappled with. Considering this, a regulatory framework needs to be urgently framed.
5. The apparatus will need to deal with myriad aspects of cryptocurrencies — sale, purchase as well as intermediaries like exchanges and trading platforms.
6. The government would do well to tread cautiously. It must identify the associated risks, and create the regulatory architecture to address them.



The digital divide in education can't be bridged by laptops and smartphones alone

Its roots lie in socio-economic inequalities, which can only be addressed through systemic changes.

Digital divide:

1. The switch to online education under the inexorable pressure of the Covid-19 pandemic has thrown into relief certain realities, which would not have otherwise received much attention.



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2. The most basic is the divide between the digital haves and have-nots, a reflection of economic inequality. Distributing smartphones and laptops to children in this context is like treating the symptom rather than the disease. The lasting solution would be in taking all-encompassing policy decisions.
3. Paradoxically, those who need a change cannot bring it about and those who can do not want it. Going behind the façade of the digital divide enables us to unravel the real dynamics.

The Indian education sector

1. The Indian education sector has been undergoing an unprecedented transformation. There has been a rapid increase in student enrolment and diversity; quality and relevance considerations are dominant.
2. Parents and students consider education an assured instrument of mobility. This was, till recently, a middle-class feature, but is now seen across the class spectrum, leading to demands for an inclusive system.
3. The digital inequality in Indian education is a cause for concern. There is a digital divide that is not educational, but a socio-economic one. The materially poor are also the digital poor.
4. The digital revolution, with its emphasis on robotics, artificial intelligence, and cloud computing, will bypass the “capability poor”. The solution hinges on guaranteeing economic security with assured basic income through the provision of universal property rights.
5. Article 21A now guarantees the right to education for children in the six-14 age group. This progressive step should be extended to all sectors and levels of education
6. Modern education is costly. The exponential growth of demand cannot be curtailed as it is linked to rising democratic and human rights consciousness. The solution lies in exploring the scope for financing on a larger canvas, tapping into the hitherto unexplored avenues, the bottom line is that no student drops out due to an inability to pay.

The steps towards this solution could include:

1. One, enhancing budget allocation by reordering fiscal priorities, and applying methods like zero-based/ outcome budgeting etc.
2. Two put education at the centre of economic/ development policy formulation. Involve the corporate sector in meeting the demand for publicly funded education, not just through CSR, but as part of academic social responsibility, in return for special concessions and incentives.



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3. Three, require parents to pay for education by ramping up their economic base through the measures mentioned above. Parents in the new scenario won't grudge payment.
4. Four, institute endowments and enhance diaspora contributions. Education today is not a question of charity, but a matter of right.

MAINS DAWP

Q1. *The digital divide in education can't be bridged by laptops and smartphones alone. Its roots lie in socio-economic inequalities, which can only be addressed through systemic changes. Critically Discuss.*

MCQs

Q1. *India is to hold the first 2+2 diplomatic dialogue with Russia in December 2021. Which of the following countries already have 2+2 dialogues with India?*

1. Japan
2. USA
3. Australia

Select the correct answer from the codes given Below

- a. 1 and 2 only
- b. 2 only
- c. 1 only
- d. 1, 2 and 3

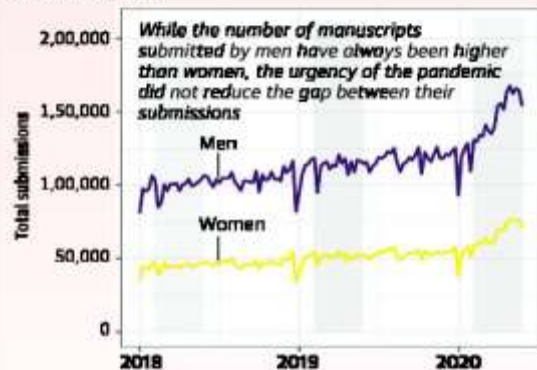


Too tied down to research

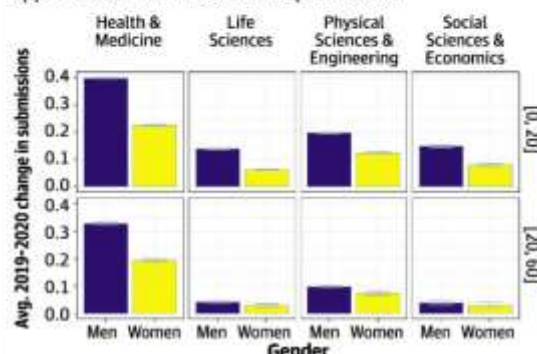
Between Feb. and May 2020, there was an explosion in the number of scholarly articles submitted to journals, which was partly driven by COVID-19-related research. A study of manuscripts submitted to Elsevier journals states that women submitted considerably fewer manuscripts than men. This trend persisted even during the first wave of the pandemic despite the rise in the submission of articles. Moreover, the gap between submissions by men and women across areas of research was more pronounced for the younger cohort, suggesting that young women researchers had fewer opportunities for research due to family obligations and caregiving duties. This hypothesis — that domestic work and caregiving duties have been delegated to women, affecting their productivity — holds true for Indian women in general if the Time Use Survey (2019) by the National Statistical Organisation is considered. A majority of Indian women were engaged in unpaid domestic work, while men participated in employment-related activities. By The Hindu Data Team



1. Gender divide | The chart shows the number of manuscripts submitted to all Elsevier journals by men and women between February 2018 and May 2020. There was a rapid increase in submissions during the first wave of the pandemic, partly propelled by a flurry in COVID-19-related research

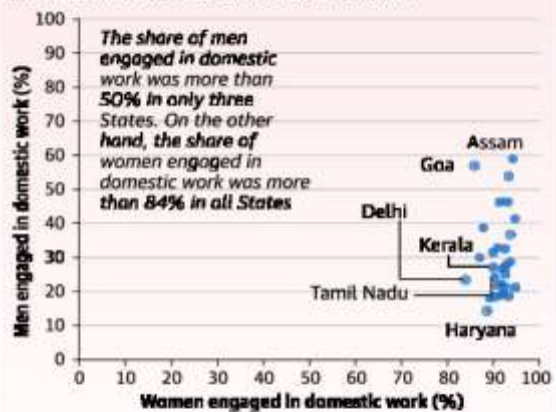


2. Wide gap | The chart shows the avg. change in submissions from Feb. to May 2020 compared to the avg. number of submissions during the same period in 2018 and 2019 across various research areas. The sample was divided into two age cohorts, < or > 20 years after receiving their MD/Ph.D. title. There is a wide gap in the submissions by men and women of the younger cohort across research areas, while the difference is relatively lesser in the senior cohort. This suggests that women especially of the younger cohort had comparatively fewer opportunities for research and publication

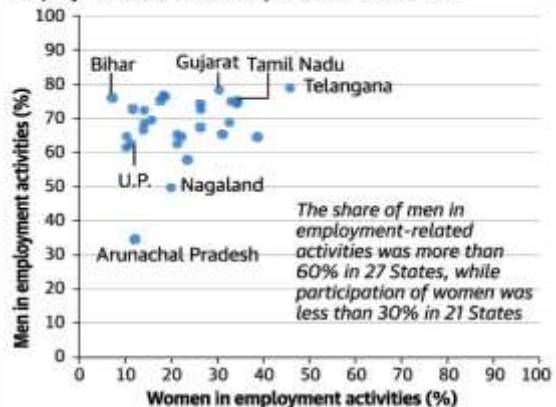


3. Domestic labour

The chart shows the share of men and women aged 15-59 engaged in unpaid domestic work across the States in India. More than 90% of women on average participated in domestic work compared to 27% of men



4. Paid employment | The chart shows the share of men and women aged 15-59 who participated in employment and related activities across the States in India. Only 22% of women were engaged in paid employment activities compared to 71% of men



Source: "Gender gap in journal submissions and peer review during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic" Squazzoni, F., Bravo, G. et al.