Employment Trends among Religious Communities of India

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Looking at the National Sample Survey Office data on employment and unemployment by major religious groups, this article finds that the Muslim community remains worse-off compared to all other religious groups on almost all indicators. It is argued that to reap the “demographic dividend”, Indian policymakers and administrators will have to proactively implement at least existing social welfare programmes, particularly those that are related to school education.

Availability of decent jobs is an entry to the inclusive growth process. In India the spread of decent jobs across regions, sectors, gender, socio-economic and other communities appears skewed. The labour market in the past decade has undergone change particularly in terms of decreased participation of rural females in the labour force as well as workforce (Table 1).

In this article the demographic characteristics of the major religious groups which have direct and indirect impact on the major trends in the labour market indicators, viz, labour force participation rate (LFPR), worker population ratio (WPR), unemployment rate (UR) by usual principal and subsidiary status (UPSS) and a strategy for enhancing the employability of the population are discussed.

The data source is the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) Report on Employment and Unemployment Situation among Major Religious Groups in India. In the 66th round of the NSSO employment-unemployment survey, information on the religion followed by the sample households was collected.

The religion of the head of the household is taken as the religion of the household. The NSSO collects data on seven major religions followed in India, viz, Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Jainism, Buddhism and Zoroastrianism. Of these, detailed analysis has been done for the four major religious groups, viz: Hinduism, Islam, Christianity and Sikhism, which account for about 98.7% of the population while the other religions have been classified in the “Others” category. The sampling is based on stratified multistage sampling. A total of 4,59,784 persons were surveyed, which is less than 1% of the total population.

Education Levels
Any analysis of employment and unemployment trends without discussing the educational level of the labour force would be incomplete as it reflects the quality of the labour force. The literacy rate among the working age population (15-59 years) was the highest for Christians, for both sexes in both rural and urban areas. Muslims had the lowest literacy

Table 1: Labour Force (in millions)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Total</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>78.9</td>
<td>280.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>106.7</td>
<td>126.2</td>
<td>232.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>308.7</td>
<td>205.1</td>
<td>513.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Source: NSSO various reports.

The views expressed are personal.

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levels: 31% and 53% for rural Muslim males and females, respectively, and 19% and 35% for urban Muslim males and females, respectively, were not literate. The proportion of persons aged 15 years and above with educational level secondary and above, was the highest for Christians, followed by Sikhs.

The age distribution of different religious categories provides an insight into the labour market. As per NSSO 2009-10, 30% of the population is in the age group of 0-14 years, i.e., the demographic dividend of the coming years. The Muslims account for the largest proportion of this age group, nearly 35%, followed by Hindus with 30%, Christians and Sikhs with 26% each.

Trends in Labour Market

LFPR – Supply Side: The LFPR is an indicator of the number of persons entering the labour market. The LFPR for males was much higher than those for females for all religious groups – the differentials being greater in urban areas where the LFPR of females was very low. The LFPR among Christians is higher as compared to other religious groups, probably due to their high literacy levels in the community. The decline in female LFPR was mainly among the Hindus and Muslims in the rural areas while the decline was more among Christian females in the urban areas (Table 2).

WPR – Demand Side: The WPR was highest among the Christians for all categories except for urban males where the same was higher for Hindus. In rural areas only the WPR among Muslims witnessed an increase during the period 1999-2000 to 2009-10. In urban areas the WPR increased across all religious groups for males and declined for females in 2009-10 as compared to 1999-2000 except for urban female Sikhs whose WPR saw an increase (Table 3).

Unemployment Rate: The portion of labour force seeking work but not employed is reflected by the UR. At the all-India level unemployment rate was around 2% in 2009-10 and the unemployment in urban areas (3.4%) was higher than that in the rural areas (1.6%). Among the religious communities in rural areas, during 2009-10, unemployment was the highest for Christians at 3.9% and in urban areas was the highest for Sikhs at 6%. Unemployment among urban females was higher than urban and rural males and females (Table 4).

Quality of Employment

The status of employment, in terms of self-employment, regular or casual, indicates the quality of employment. Self-employment was the main occupation in the rural areas among both males and females while in the urban areas self-employment and regular employment was almost on par.

Among regular employees Christians accounted for a higher proportion as compared to other religious communities in both rural and urban areas. This is probably due to their high literacy levels (Table 5).

Enhancing Employability

It emerges that the LFPR and WPR vary across religious groups irrespective of region and gender. However, the Muslim community is behind other religious communities in terms of educational attainment, labour force participation, workforce participation and this lag is more so in the case of Muslim females. In education, there appears to be some improvement after the implementation of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan scheme. For instance, at the all-India level enrolment of Muslim students at the primary level (i-v) has increased from 13% in 2010-11 to 14.2% in 2012-13. At the upper-primary level (vi-viii), the enrolment increased from 11.25% in 2010-11 to 11.75% in 2012-13.
to 12.11% in 2012-13. The positive development is that share of Muslim girls in enrolment increased to 49% at the primary level and 51.48% at the upper-primary level during 2012-13.

The age distribution of the population suggests that among the children in the age group of 5-14 years the attendance rates for the major religious communities was around 80% in rural areas. But for the age group of 15-19 years, as children move to the secondary level and higher there is a general decline among all religious communities, especially rural Hindu and Muslim females. This decline could be due to socio-economic factors such as distance from the residence, absence of scholarships, involvement in household chores, meagre resources, etc. Similarly, among rural males also there is a decline in attendance rates after the age of 14 years, which is an indicator of the quality of the labour force in the future. Both in the rural and urban areas the decline is more among the Hindus and the Muslims. Low income levels and lack of institutional support from the respective religious communities could be the reason for low attendance levels among the Hindus and Muslims.

In addition to the above, it may be pointed out that not only is the general education level low but also the percentage of people joining the labour force with vocational education/training. This affects the employability of the labour force across all religious communities.

**Notes**

2. Ibid.