

Working women more vulnerable to automation than men, says IMF

Research paper says 180 million jobs for women are at risk globally

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Women are at a higher risk of losing jobs to automation than their male counterparts as businesses worldwide move towards a technology-driven approach, said a recent research by the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

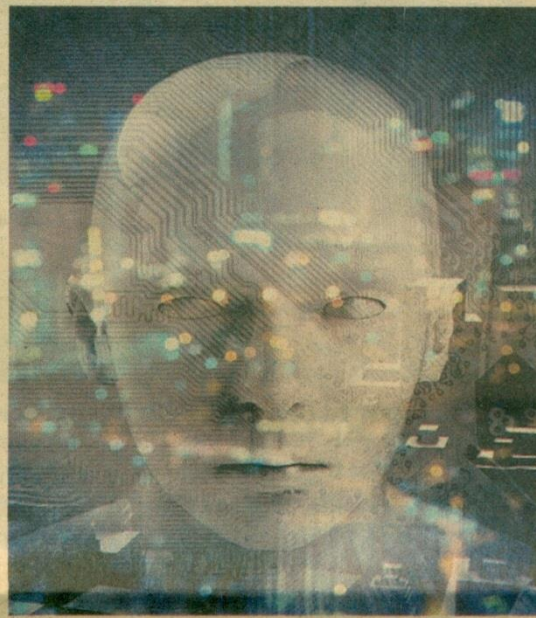
According to the report, based on a staff discussion note (SDN) by the IMF, an estimated 26 million female jobs spanning across 30 countries (including 28 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries, and Cyprus and Singapore) are at the risk of being displaced by technology, especially automation, over the next two decades.

Using individual-level data on task composition at work, the IMF SDN found that women, on an average, perform more routine and occupational tasks than men across all sectors. And these are most prone to automation.

While the male workforce is also at the risk of losing jobs to automation, their chances are two percentage points less than the female workforce (11 per cent of the female workforce to 9 per cent of the male workforce), it found.

Lesser educated, older female workers (aged 40 and above), and those in low skill, clerical, services, and sales positions are disproportionately exposed to automation. "Extrapolating our results, we find that about 180 million female jobs are at a high risk of being displaced globally," said the report.

According to experts, jobs with a higher share of tasks that can be performed by following a defined set of



rules are more prone to automation. In contrast, jobs requiring analytical, communicational and technical skills are less prone.

Global recruitment firm Randstad noted a higher level of risk from automation and Artificial intelligence (AI) to job roles in the customer services space. "Because of the improvement in IVR technology and chatbots, we clearly see a threat over the next three to five years. In general, the gender parity is almost 50-50 in this sector," said Paul Dupuis, MD & CEO Randstad India.

A recently released NITI Aayog report reveals that despite increasing levels of education, India's female labour force participation rate has declined to 24 per cent. It also found that if women do as much formal work as men, India would experience an additional 1.4 per cent GDP growth.

Human resource experts, however, say that having a risk to job loss is not the same as actually losing jobs. With businesses rapidly adopting digital technology, a lot of them are focussed on reskilling and upskilling their existing workforce to ensure business continuity.

"While it is true that a large part of the formal service sector in India is comprised of business process management jobs and that women are a significant part of this workforce, it is important to understand that companies themselves are increasingly moving towards greater diversity and are thus hiring more women," said Ajay Shah, Vice President and head of recruitment, TeamLease.

Shah added that there is a greater dearth of women in sales and technology-centric jobs globally as well as in India. So, in order to ensure women continue to participate in the workforce despite changes in job roles, women have to be encouraged in these non-traditional job profiles.

According to global statistics, women are 15 per cent less likely to grow to managerial position in technology sector than men.

Besides, 19 per cent of them are more likely to do clerical and services works which are more routine tasks, which leaves women at a high risk of displacement by technology.

According to India's National Sample Survey, there were roughly four men for every woman in highly skilled occupations, and only 13 per cent of all management and senior positions were held by women.

The diversity gap is slightly better in technology jobs where almost 30 per cent of the workforce is female.