



BAJIRAO IAS ACADEMY

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**INDIA-EU
RELATIONS**



Women in STEM Fields

Women, STEM careers and a more receptive industry

Every year on July 15, as we observe World Youth Skills Day, we are reminded that skills development is fundamental to reducing unemployment and promoting decent work. India faces a critical paradox: 43% of India's STEM graduates are women, the highest proportion among major economies globally. Yet, women represent only 27% of the STEM workforce, limiting women's access to career opportunities offered by the STEM sector.

According to the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2023-24, India's overall female labour force participation rate (FLFPR) has risen to 41.7%, a meaningful jump after years of stagnation. However, the increase is sharper for rural women (47.6%) than in urban areas (25.4%), reflecting barriers in formal employment, workplace safety, and societal expectations. In STEM, the paradox is more pronounced. According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2021), only 31.5% of researchers worldwide are women. This education-employment gap reflects systemic barriers that industry is uniquely positioned to address. The economic stakes are clear. According to estimates by the McKinsey Global Institute, enabling 68 million more women to participate in India's workforce could boost India's GDP by up to \$700 billion by 2025. Similarly, the World Bank suggests that achieving a 50% female workforce participation rate could elevate GDP growth by 1%.

Government vision and STEM skilling

The New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 paved the way for higher retention and opportunities in the fields of STEM. The nodal Ministry of Education (MoE) has integrated education with skills development and life skills training. The Government's renewed focus on revitalising Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) and expanding



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World Youth Skills Day is a reminder that industry is losing out by not investing in STEM careers for India's women

vocational skilling is bringing high-quality technical education and training closer to villages and small towns, ensuring broader access for youth across rural India.

This progress aligns with the Prime Minister's vision of Viksit Bharat (or developed India), where women's economic mobility forms the cornerstone of inclusive development. The share of the gender budget in the total national Budget has increased from 6.8% in 2024-25 to 8.8% in 2025-26 with ₹4.49 lakh crore in allocation toward gender-specific programmes.

Further, the Union Budget 2025-26 introduced term loans for women entrepreneurs, new National Skill Training Institutes, and investments in technology-driven skilling. India's policy framework, from Skill India to Digital India, and from 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao' to PM Vishwakarma Yojana, has the right intent. However, government policy alone cannot bridge the education-employment gap. Industry must transform from passive recruiter to active enabler of women's career transitions.

Industry as the missing link

Industry plays a critical role in bridging the gap between skilling and employment, especially for women. Persistent social norms, such as the belief that "mechanical means masculine" or that "coding isn't for girls", continue to create invisible barriers for skilled women entering technical fields. These stereotypes are well-documented in multiple studies, including those by the World Bank and UNESCO, which highlight how gendered perceptions limit women's participation in STEM and technical trades. Evidence also shows that women do not leave STEM fields due to a lack of ability, but instead because workplaces are often unwelcoming, families lack awareness of career

opportunities, and roles remain deeply gendered. Addressing these perceptions, alongside ensuring workplace safety, equitable pay, and support for career transitions related to marriage, childbirth, and caregiving, is key to unlocking the full potential of the workforce.

India's private sector is increasingly stepping up, with many companies championing structured mentoring programmes, industry-linked training initiatives and partnerships with educational institutions to create direct pathways from classrooms to careers. One such initiative is the UN Women's WeSTEM programme, being implemented in collaboration with the Governments of Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat, and supported by the Micron Foundation. This programme provides access to skills and bridges the talent gap. By engaging families and community leaders, conducting workplace safety sessions, and introducing women role models in classrooms, the programme recognises that skill-building requires a shift in mindsets to be effective.

A blueprint for industry leadership

Industry partnerships with educational institutions, mentorship networks linking professionals with students, and workplace policies that accommodate life transitions and ensure safety, can bridge the education-employment gap. The question is not whether India can afford to invest in women's STEM careers. It is whether industry can afford not to. By equipping women and girls with the skills and training needed to succeed in STEM fields, we can create a more inclusive and robust society. When a woman earns, her voice and impact echoes across dinner tables, shop floors, policy rooms and entire industries. And in that voice lies the blueprint of a future ready India.

Context

On **World Youth Skills Day (15th July)**, attention has been drawn to India's persistent gap between the high proportion of female STEM graduates and their low workforce participation, highlighting the need for coordinated efforts by government and industry to address systemic and structural barriers.

Persistent Paradox in Women's STEM Participation

- ❑ Despite having 43% of global STEM graduates as women, only 27% of India's STEM workforce comprises women, revealing deep systemic gaps between education and employment.
- ❑ As per PLFS 2023–24, the Female Labour Force Participation Rate (FLFPR) reached 41.7%—but rural women (47.6%) outperform urban women (25.4%), indicating structural and socio-cultural constraints in formal sectors.
- ❑ According to McKinsey Global Institute, including 68 million more women in the workforce could raise India's GDP by up to \$700 billion by 2025. The World Bank links a 1% GDP growth with a 50% female workforce participation rate.

Governmental Frameworks for Inclusive Skilling

- ❑ National Education Policy (NEP) and Vocational Push through NEP 2020 as it integrates skills and life education.
- ❑ Government is modernising ITIs and expanding vocational skilling to rural areas, linking skilling with employability and inclusiveness.
- ❑ Gender-Budgetary Commitments in Union Budget 2025–26 as Gender budget allocation rose to Rs 4.49 lakh crore (8.8% of total budget), including schemes like term loans for women entrepreneurs and establishment of National Skill Training Institutes.
- ❑ Women's economic empowerment is a pillar of inclusive growth under the Viksit Bharat initiative. Schemes like Skill India, Digital India, and PM Vishwakarma Yojana further this empowerment framework.

Role of Industry in Enabling Gender-Responsive Employment

- ❑ **Cultural Barriers in Technical Domains:** Deep-rooted gender norms (“mechanical is masculine”) hinder entry of women into STEM and technical jobs.
- ❑ UNESCO and World Bank note that cultural perceptions, not competence, are key obstacles.
- ❑ **Corporate Interventions for STEM Inclusion:** Initiatives like UN Women’s WeSTEM—backed by Micron Foundation—partner with state governments to ensure skilling, mentorship, and mindset shifts via safety trainings, family engagement, and visible role models.
- ❑ **Industry-Driven Ecosystem for Career Continuity:** Structured mentorship, industry-academia partnerships, flexible workplace policies, and safety assurance are vital to support women through life transitions and ensure STEM career retention.

India-Europe Relations

The importance of India and Europe walking in step

In a world increasingly marked by disorder and divergence, as foreign policy maven cast about for new policy initiatives, the India-Europe relationship stands as a compelling case for diplomatic renewal – rooted in civilisational depth, yet animated by contemporary relevance. If history has often rendered them distant participants in each other's geopolitical imagination, the present moment demands – and enables – a more purposeful engagement.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's G-7 diplomacy and External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar's renewed focus on Europe reflect a conscious pivot towards a continent in flux. This is not merely a recognition of Europe's enduring economic weight or cultural capital; it is an astute reading of the evolving global chessboard, where yesterday's alliances are fraying, and new solidarities are emerging across the hemispheres.

An order upended, a partnership emerging

The transatlantic realm, long anchored by American leadership, finds itself adrift amidst United States President Donald Trump's iconoclasm. His transactional world view, scepticism towards the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, disdain for traditional allies, and dalliance with adversaries such as Russian President Vladimir Putin have unnerved Washington's most steadfast partners. The G-7, once the de facto board of directors for global governance, convened last month not in consensus, but in contention.

For Canada, the United Kingdom, Germany, and France – each recalibrating their foreign policies – the strategic logic of looking eastward has grown sharper. Canada, disentangling itself from overdependence on the U.S., now seeks deeper integration with Europe and emerging powers such as India (the hiccup over its mollycoddling of Khalistani extremists notwithstanding). The U.K., shedding its Brexit-era illusions, embraces renewed continental ties. And Germany, awakened from strategic somnolence, has embarked on a path of defence investment and industrial reinvention. In this milieu, Europe is striving not simply to stay relevant but to become a pole of power in its own right.

The rhetoric of "strategic autonomy", once French fancy, is now echoed in Berlin, Warsaw, and Brussels alike. From French President Emmanuel Macron's nuclear umbrella to Germany's constitutional recalibration for military spending, and the Weimar Triangle's assertiveness in central Europe, the project of European reinvention is well underway.

India's external engagement, long characterised by prudence and non-alignment, is morphing into a more assertive posture of



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Their shared values and strategic compulsions can lead to a partnership of conviction and result in a more stable and equitable world

"multi-alignment". In a world veering toward bipolar rivalry between the U.S. and China, India and Europe, both aspirational middle powers, find common cause in championing a multipolar order that is anchored in international law, inclusive institutions and plural values. This convergence plays out on several fronts. The India-European Union (EU) engagement now unfolds on two levels. Institutionally, the EU and India are expanding their long-standing dialogue in areas of shared and exclusive competencies – from trade and technology to security and climate change. Bilaterally, ties with major member states – France, Germany, Italy and, increasingly, the Nordic and Eastern European nations – are acquiring greater strategic depth.

Economic ties as a corridor of opportunity

Few statistics capture the potential of this moment better than the startling rise in bilateral trade and investment. Between 2015 and 2022, EU foreign direct investment in India grew by 70%, with France's investments alone skyrocketing by 373%. In the last three years, EU imports from India have doubled, underscoring New Delhi's growing economic magnetism. Yet, India and Europe are still only scratching the surface.

The much-anticipated India-EU Trade and Investment Agreements must now be fast-tracked with an "early harvest" accord that shows some sensitivity to India's green transition. The European Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism, laudable in spirit, must be reinterpreted through the lens of equity. Climate ambition must never become climate protectionism. The India-Middle East Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) can become a modern Silk Road linking geographies not only in trade, but also in enterprise, energy, and innovation. It is an answer to the Indo-Pacific's demand for infrastructure that is transparent, sustainable and sovereign in spirit.

Perhaps the most exciting frontier lies in technology. India and Europe both view digital architecture not as a proprietary domain of Big Tech but as public infrastructure for the global good. As Mr. Modi observed at the AI Action Summit, the partnership can span the entire digital lifecycle – from innovation to governance, from standards to regulation. Europe's leadership in deep tech, digital manufacturing, and semiconductors dovetails with India's dynamism in software, digital public goods and scalable platforms. Together, they can lead in clean energy innovation, biotechnology, ocean sustainability, food security and resilient health-care systems.

To harness this, both sides must invest in human mobility. A comprehensive mobility agreement for students, scientists and scholars

will enrich talent pools, ease Indian unemployment and fertilise bilateral innovation. In the age of ideas, cross-border thinkers are as valuable as cross-border capital.

Strategic alignment now extends to defence and counter-terrorism. Europe remains an important source of armaments for India, and as both sides seek self-reliance – India under Atmanirbhar Bharat, Europe through ReArm 2025 – there is scope for unprecedented co-development and technology transfer. Maritime cooperation, cyber security, space collaboration, and joint responses to terrorism offer a template for trust. Europe must also adopt a firmer line on Pakistan's enabling of Islamist extremism – an issue that has scarred both sides. Technical cooperation is not enough; political will must follow.

In a world where great powers often behave as if might is right, middle powers such as India and Europe must act as custodians of a rules-based order. Not as relics of a liberal utopia, but as realists pursuing stability through coalitions, not coercion. Their shared belief in multilateralism, in resisting hegemonic binaries and in empowering the Global South with inclusive frameworks, sets them apart from more prescriptive paradigms. This ethic must shape their joint leadership in forums from the United Nations to the World Trade Organization (WTO), and from the Quad (Australia, India, Japan, U.S.) to the Artificial Intelligence (AI) governance tables.

Changing minds, not just policies

Finally, let us not underestimate the power of perception. Public sentiment, media narratives and political attention must align with strategic intent. Relationships flourish not merely through summits and statistics, but through empathy, imagination and sustained effort. Europe must move beyond stereotypes of India as a reluctant partner; India must appreciate Europe's complex transitions with greater nuance. The Raisina Dialogue in Marseille (June 2025), the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen's symbolic visit to Delhi (February 2025), and India's diplomatic investment in the Mediterranean and Nordic regions, are all promising steps.

If the last decade taught us that history has a sense of humour (think of our relations with the two iterations of the Trump Administration), the coming one demands we have a sense of purpose. India and Europe, long circling one another, must now walk in step knowing that their shared values and strategic compulsions form a partnership not of convenience, but conviction. For in each other, they may just find not a mirror, but a window to a more stable, inclusive and equitable world.

Context

India is intensifying its diplomatic engagement with Europe through **high-level visits, strategic dialogues, and trade negotiations**, signalling a shift toward deeper strategic and economic cooperation amidst global geopolitical realignments.

Strategic Realignments and Shared Vision

- ❑ India has transitioned from its traditional non-aligned posture to **multi-alignment**, engaging with diverse global players including the European Union (EU) to preserve strategic autonomy in a bipolar world dominated by U.S.–China rivalry.
- ❑ **Europe's Pursuit of Strategic Autonomy:** Key EU members like France and Germany have embraced the **concept of strategic autonomy**, aiming to reduce overdependence on the U.S., recalibrate NATO reliance, and establish Europe as an independent pole of global influence.
- ❑ **Multipolarity as a Common Strategic Goal:** Both India and Europe seek to advance a **multipolar world order** grounded in **international law**, **plural values**, **inclusive institutions**, and **multilateral cooperation**, as a counterbalance to rising authoritarianism and geopolitical coercion.

Economic, Trade, and Technology Synergies

- ❑ Between 2015 and 2022, **EU FDI in India grew by 70%**, with **France's investment alone rising by 373%**, while EU imports from India have doubled—indicating a strong but under-leveraged trade potential.
- ❑ **India–EU Trade and Investment Agreement (TIA)** The delayed **India–EU TIA** must be expedited with an **Early Harvest Agreement**, while addressing India's concerns regarding the **European Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM)**, to ensure climate justice and avoid disguised protectionism.
- ❑ Europe's deep-tech leadership complements India's scalable digital public goods.
- ❑ Joint leadership in **clean energy, AI governance, semiconductor manufacturing, and biotech** can reshape global digital and green transitions.

Security, Defence, and Global Governance

- ❑ Europe is a key arms supplier to India; under **Atmanirbhar Bharat** and **ReArm 2025**, there is unprecedented scope for **technology transfer, joint production**, and strengthening defence industrial bases on both sides.
- ❑ **Maritime and Cyber Security, Counter-Terrorism** Strategic cooperation extends to **maritime domain awareness, space collaboration, cybersecurity**, and tackling terrorism, especially pressuring Pakistan over state-sponsored extremism—an issue that affects both regions.
- ❑ India and Europe are aligned on reforming **multilateral forums (UN, WTO)** and co-leading **Global South-centric frameworks**, resisting hegemonic binaries and preserving a **rules-based, democratic global order**.

Dowry Deaths in India

Dowry deaths in India: Long investigations, rare convictions

A spate of dowry-related deaths in the last two months has put the spotlight back on the illegal practice

DATA POINT

Devyanshi Bhatnagar
Vijesh Radhakrishnan

In the last three months, a string of dowry-related deaths have been reported from across India. In Aligarh in Uttar Pradesh, a woman died after a hot iron was pressed against parts of her body. Her family claimed that she had been regularly assaulted for dowry. In Chandigarh, a young bride died by suicide allegedly due to dowry harassment. In Tamil Nadu, near Pudukkottai, a woman died by suicide just four days after her wedding, allegedly due to harassment from her in-laws for dowry. Another woman from Tiruppur, Tamil Nadu, took her life within two months of marriage for the same reason.

These cases show that the illegal practice of seeking dowry continues to thrive in India. Every year, in the 2017-2022 period, an average of 7,000 cases of dowry deaths were reported across the country, according to the National Crime Records Bureau. It is important to note that these were only reported cases. As several more go unreported, the NCRB data only gives us a conservative estimate.

The numbers are alarming. And when we look closely at the data, we find that investigations into these deaths were slow and convictions were few and far between.

Of the 7,000 dowry deaths reported every year on average, only around 4,500 were charge-sheeted by the police. The rest were either stuck at various stages of investigation or disposed off for various reasons including 'case true but insufficient evidence', 'false case', and 'complaint was based on a misunderstanding or incorrect information'. Some cases were stuck in the investigation stage for more than six months. Of the more than 6,000 dowry death cases pending investigation at the end of 2022, 67% were stuck in that stage for over six months (Chart 1).

There were also inordinate delays in filing the charge-sheet. Of the nearly 3,000 dowry death cases pending investigation at the end of 2022, 70% were filed following investigations that lasted for over two months (Chart 2).

Even when investigations were done, charge-sheets were filed, and cases reached the court, only a few resulted in convictions. The rest got stuck in court procedures or were disposed off by the courts because they were withdrawn, or compromised, or ended in a plea bargain. In some cases, the accused were acquitted due to lack of evidence.

Of the average of 6,500 cases sent for trial every year, only around 100 resulted in convictions. Over 80% of the rest remained pending in court at various stages. If we look at the rest, some ended in acquittals, some cases were discharged before trial, and some were quashed.

Dowry was the main motive behind over 6,300 murders across India in the 2017-2022 period. Over 60% of these murders were reported in West Bengal, Odisha, and Bihar. Cases from these three States and Jharkhand, and those in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Haryana and Rajasthan constituted 80% of all the dowry death cases filed in the 2017-2022 period (Map 3).

Among the 19 cities in India for which data was available, 30% of all the dowry deaths cases were filed in Delhi in that period, the highest for any city (Chart 4). Delhi was followed by Kanpur, Bengaluru, Lucknow, and Patna.

With inputs from Akash Gupta who is interviewing with The Hindu Data Trust

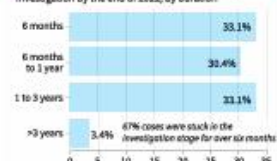
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Crime and slow punishment

The data used for the charts were sourced from the Crime in India reports (back 3 and book 3) published by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)



Chart 1: The share of dowry death cases pending investigation by the end of 2022, by duration



Map 3: The State-wise share of dowry death cases filed in the 2017-2022 period

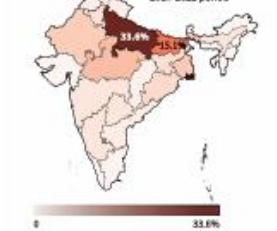


Chart 2: The time taken to file charge-sheets for the share of dowry death cases for which charge-sheets were filed in 2022

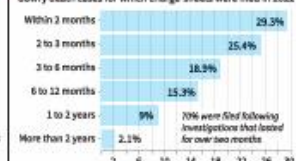


Chart 4: The city-wise share of dowry death cases filed in the 2017-2022 period



Existing Legal Framework

- Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 criminalizes giving, taking, or demanding dowry.
- Section 304B of IPC defines dowry death and prescribes punishment (minimum 7 years to life imprisonment).
- Section 498A of IPC penalizes cruelty by husband or relatives.

Persistent Violations

- Despite laws, an average of 7,000 dowry deaths reported annually (NCRB 2017–2022).
- Multiple incidents of torture, burning, or suicides related to dowry demands continue to surface, reflecting legal ineffectiveness in prevention.

Geographic Distribution and Trends

- 80% of cases concentrated in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Rajasthan, Haryana, Odisha, West Bengal, and Madhya Pradesh.
- Among 19 major cities, **Delhi alone accounted for 30% of dowry death cases**, followed by Kanpur, Bengaluru, Lucknow, and Patna.

Way Forward

- Enforce time-bound charge-sheeting and mandatory oversight on delayed investigations.
- Improve coordination between police, medical officers, and forensic labs.
- Fast-track courts for dowry and domestic violence cases.
- Training police and judiciary on gender-sensitive protocols.
- Gender-sensitization programs in schools, colleges, and panchayats.
- Reward dowry-free marriages through public recognition and incentives.
- Expand helplines, safe houses, and victim compensation schemes.
- Disaggregated data publication by NCRB including details on pendency, conviction, withdrawal, and state-wise bottlenecks.

Enjoy free speech

Enjoy free speech with self-restraint, not abuse, says SC, talks of guidelines

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, JULY 14

SAYING THAT citizens must know the "value of freedom of speech and expression" and exercise "self-restraint" on social media, failing which the state would intervene, the Supreme Court on Monday considered framing guidelines to control "divisive tendencies" on virtual platforms.

Seeking the assistance of the counsel for the petitioner and the state "vis-a-vis the guidelines to be issued to citizens", the court said it was not "speaking about censorship" but would look beyond the petition in the "interest of fraternity, secularism and dignity of individuals".

The court was hearing a plea filed by a Kolkata resident, Wazahat Khan, seeking consolidation of FIRs registered against him in different states over his social media posts.

"If they (citizens) want to enjoy the fundamental right of speech and expression, it should

EXPLAINED
E The horizontal approach

IN A 2023 verdict, the Supreme Court recognised a horizontal approach to the right to freedom of speech and expression, which means a citizen can invoke the right not just against the state but also against other citizens. Essentially, a citizen can sue another citizen for violating free speech.

INSIDE

SC TERMS POST ON PM INFLAMMATORY
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be with the reasonable restrictions also. Apart from that, there
CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

CONTEXT

- ❑ The **Supreme Court** has raised concerns over the **rising misuse of free speech**, particularly on **social media platforms** and **online platforms**, and hinted at the need for **regulatory guidelines**.
- ❑ It emphasized **self-restraint** and **reasonable restrictions** to protect **fraternity, secularism, and individual dignity** in the face of **unprecedented growth in ai-generated deepfakes** and other forms of potentially harmful digital content.

Supreme Court's Concerns on Free Speech Misuse

- ❑ A Bench of Justices B.V. Nagarathna and K.V. Viswanathan noted the growing trend of **abusive content** and **divisive narratives** on social media, highlighting the **real-world impact** of digital forgeries and manipulated content.
- ❑ The Court emphasized that **freedom of speech** is not **absolute** and must be balanced with **reasonable restrictions**, particularly in light of the challenges posed by **ai-generated content** that can be **impossible to distinguish** from genuine media.
- ❑ It expressed concern that such speech is being used to **instigate hatred** and **disrupt social harmony**, underlining the need for measures to protect **affected individuals** from the misuse of their **digital representation**.
- ❑ Justice Nagarathna remarked that **citizens must regulate themselves**, or else the **State will be forced to intervene**, suggesting the potential need for a **supervisory authority** to oversee **online platforms**.
- ❑ Justice Viswanathan highlighted that **fraternity among citizens** is essential to curb mutual animosity, emphasizing the importance of maintaining social cohesion in the face of potentially divisive **ai deepfakes**.

About Article 19(1)(a) of the Indian Constitution:

– **Article 19(1)(a)** of the Indian Constitution guarantees the **Right to Freedom of Speech and Expression**.

– **Reasonable restrictions** under **Article 19(2)** include interests of **sovereignty, security, public order, morality, contempt of court, defamation**, and **incitement to an offense**.

– The Court clarified that its intention is **not censorship** but to promote **responsible digital conduct**, recognizing the challenges posed by new technologies like **generative ai**.

– **Fraternity**, a key value in the **Preamble**, was invoked to underscore **communal harmony and mutual respect** in the digital age.

– The case also reflects the **limits of state intervention** in digital speech unless it becomes socially harmful, highlighting the need for balanced regulation of **ai-generated content**.



Thank you

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