What the employment data establish

The only two rises in 34 years of ILO's modelled series for India, 1991 to 2025, came in 2020 (4.02 points) and 2023 (0.65 points). On MoSPI's own survey, agriculture's share of workers aged 15 and over rose from 42.47 per cent in 2018-19 to 46.01 per cent in 2023-24.

Between 2018-19 and 2023-24, agriculture's share of India's workers aged 15 and over rose from 42.47 per cent to 46.01 per cent, counting both main and subsidiary work, on MoSPI's own PLFS unit records. Unpaid helpers on family farms account for more than the whole rise: their share of all workers went from 10.87 per cent to 16.33 per cent, while the share of all other farm workers fell from 31.61 per cent to 29.68 per cent.

In this report: PLFS; RBI; China.

Measure	Earlier observation	Later observation
PLFS usual status, 15+, July-June	2018-19: 42.47%	2023-24: 46.01%
OWID, ILO modelled, 2025	India: 41.6%	China: 21.7%

On MoSPI's own surveys, each read within its own design, agriculture's share of workers aged 15 and over fell by 9.48 points in the seven years from 2004-05 to 2011-12 (NSS, 58.32 to 48.84 per cent). It rose by about 1.9 points in the six years from 2017-18 to 2023-24 (PLFS, 44.11 to 46.01 per cent). The two surveys differ in design, so only the change within each survey is compared, and never a level across them.

Aggregate changes do not count identified workers moving from factories or services into farming. RBI and Mehrotra counts remain separately attributed.

RBI's KLEMS database of July 2024 puts agricultural employment at 20.28 crore in 2018-19 and 25.30 crore in 2022-23, a rise of 5.03 crore. Its industry series stops in 2022-23, and its provisional total for 2023-24 carries no agricultural figure. In RBI's KLEMS database, agriculture accounts for 48.3 per cent of the increase in persons employed between 2018-19 and 2022-23.

Santosh Mehrotra estimates about 200 million agricultural workers in 2019 and 280 million in 2024. Mehrotra says his estimate applies survey employment shares to the Government's population projections; RBI's figure comes from its KLEMS database of July 2024.

Primary sources: MoSPI PLFS microdata; PLFS 2025 release and comparability warning; RBI KLEMS workbook; Mehrotra, 1 October 2026; OWID sector table.

India and China from 1960

Historical GGDC estimates put agriculture at 71.9% of Indian employment and 65.1% of Chinese employment in 1960. By 1980, the shares were 72.4% and 68.7%. The ILO series, which begins in 1991, puts the 2025 shares at 41.6% and 21.7%. The historical and modern series overlap but differ, and are retained separately.

Comparing governments and leadership eras

Use percentage-point change per year, with the three-year average as the main trend line and annual changes behind it. In the ILO series, India's average is 1.07 points of decline per year in 2004-2014, versus 0.33 in 2014-2025. China's decline is fastest among the modern leadership windows under Hu. Transition-year checks preserve both comparisons. These are descriptive comparisons, not causal estimates.

Does income growth accompany the shift from agriculture?

For 1992-2025, the correlation between real GDP-per-person growth and the decline in agriculture's share is 0.71 in India and 0.56 in China. Excluding 2020-2021 gives 0.24 and 0.61, respectively. India's result is more sensitive to the pandemic and year alignment. These are associations, not causal effects.

Sources: MoSPI PLFS/NSS unit data; office calculations, 29 October 2026. GGDC 10-Sector Database, January 2015. OWID / ILO / World Bank, 2026.