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PLFS October 2026: Unemployment Rate at 4.9%, Female LFPR at Its Highest Since February



Original symbolic illustration: pcsmantra.com

Why in the news

The National Statistical Office (NSO) under the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) released the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) Monthly Bulletin for October 2026 on 16 November 2026. The Unemployment Rate (UR) for persons aged 15 years and above fell to 4.9% from 5% in September; it is 0.3 percentage points lower than the same period last year. This is the nineteenth bulletin in the monthly series.

Key figures (age 15+, CWS basis)

Unemployment Rate (UR): overall 4.9% (September: 5.0%). Year-on-year, rural UR fell from 4.4% to 4.2% and urban UR from 7.0% to 6.7%. Month-on-month, rural UR was unchanged at 4.2% and urban UR fell from 6.9% to 6.7%. Urban female UR was 8.7% versus 6.0% for urban males; rural female UR was 3.8% - the lowest level of 2026.
Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR): overall 55.7% (September: 55.5%). Rural rose from 58.0% to 58.4%; urban was 50.5% (September: 50.7%; October 2025: 50.5%).
Female LFPR: rose from 34.6% to 35.0% - the highest since February 2026. Rural female LFPR 39.5%, urban female 25.9%; a year-on-year gain of 0.8 percentage points.

Key terms explained

LFPR (Labour Force Participation Rate): the share (per cent) of the population that is either working or seeking work.
UR (Unemployment Rate): the share of the labour force that is seeking work but not finding it.
WPR (Worker Population Ratio): the share of the population that is employed.
CWS (Current Weekly Status): the method of measuring activity status on the basis of the reference week; the monthly bulletins are based on it.
PLFS: the NSO (MoSPI) survey that is the primary source of official employment-unemployment data. The methodology was revised from January 2025 to provide monthly and quarterly estimates; monthly bulletins have been released since April 2025.

Way forward

Urban female unemployment (8.7%) remains well above average - creating quality jobs for women in urban areas is the next policy challenge. The rise in rural LFPR is positive, but the quality of work (unpaid family work versus wage employment) will become clearer in the coming quarterly data.

Frequently asked questions

Q1: What was the unemployment rate in October 2026?
Answer: 4.9% (age 15+, CWS) - it was 5.0% in September 2026.

Q2: Who conducts the PLFS?
Answer: The National Statistical Office (NSO), Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI).

Q3: Since when have PLFS Monthly Bulletins been released?
Answer: The methodology was revised from January 2025 and monthly bulletins have been released since April 2025; the October 2026 bulletin is the nineteenth in the series.

Prelims practice questions

Question 1: Consider the following statements with reference to the PLFS Monthly Bulletin for October 2026:
Statement 1: The overall unemployment rate was 4.9%
Statement 2: Overall female LFPR was 35.0%, the highest since February 2026
Statement 3: The urban female unemployment rate was lower than the urban male unemployment rate

Which of the above statements are correct?

(a) 1 and 2 only
(b) 2 and 3 only
(c) 1 and 3 only
(d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer and explanation
Correct answer: (a)
Statements 1 and 2 are correct
Statement 3 is incorrect - urban female UR was 8.7%, higher than the urban male UR (6.0%)

Question 2: Consider the following statements:
Statement 1: PLFS Monthly Bulletins are based on the Current Weekly Status (CWS) approach
Statement 2: PLFS is conducted by the National Statistical Office, MoSPI

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

(a) 1 only
(b) 2 only
(c) Both 1 and 2
(d) Neither 1 nor 2

Answer and explanation
Correct answer: (c)
Both statements are correct - the bulletins are based on the CWS approach, and PLFS is an NSO, MoSPI survey

Sources

- MoSPI, PLFS Monthly Bulletin October 2026 (press note): www.mospi.gov.in
- PIB press note (16 November 2026): www.pib.gov.in

Related reading

- PLFS Revamp (January 2027): Bringing Gig Workers and Unpaid Work into Statistics