

At 48 hrs a week, Indians 6th most hardworking globally: ILO

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Infosys co-founder Narayana Murthy triggered a debate recently when he said youths should work 70 hours a week, but in fact, Indians are already the sixth most hardworking out of 163 countries in the world.

The ranking is based on taking the average number of hours per week for each employed person in India, which works out to 47.7 hours, according to the latest International Labour Organisation (ILO) data of April 2023.

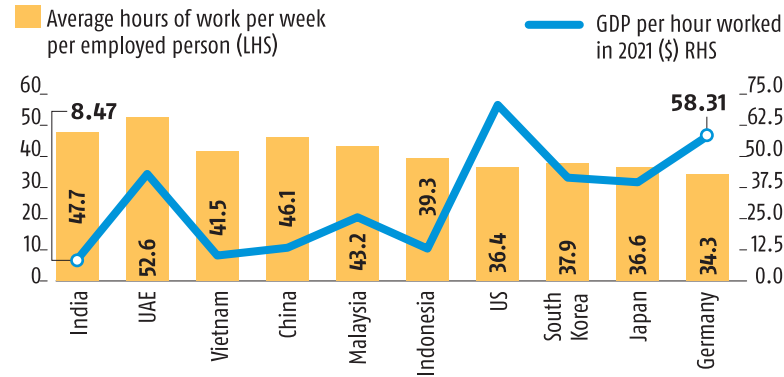
This figure shows that Indians work longer than workers in China (46.1 hours), Vietnam (41.5 hours), Malaysia (43.2 hours), the Philippines (39.2 hours), Japan (36.6 hours), the United States (36.4 hours) and the United Kingdom (35.9 hours).

But Indians work less than smaller countries with small populations such as Bhutan, the Congo, Lesotho, and Gambia. The issue, as many industrialists who engaged with Murthy in the debate, is not hours but productivity.



India is ranked at 131 out of 189 countries based on GDP per hour worked (GDP constant at 2017) for 2021, adjusted for purchasing power parity. Based on this parameter, India is pegged at \$8.47

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Note: To explain how productivity is calculated, it is the total volume of output (measured in terms of GDP) produced per unit of labour for 2021 (measured in terms of the number of employed persons or hours worked) at a constant GDP of 2017 and adjusted to purchasing power parity.
Source: ILO. Countries chosen by their relevance to India in business

dollars, lower than Vietnam (\$10.22), the Philippines (\$10.07), Indonesia (\$12.96), China (\$13.35), Mexico (\$20.23) and Malaysia (\$25.59) – countries with which India either competes for exports or

woos for investment.

A similar result can be seen through another measure to calculate labour productivity. This one is based on the annual growth rate of output per worker in

percentage terms (based on GDP which is constant at 2015). India's annual growth rate of output per worker was up by only 3.1 per cent in 2022, much lower than Vietnam (4.8 per cent), China (3.4 per cent), Cambodia (3.6 per cent) and even Bangladesh (4.1 per cent).

For some perspective, while India's output per worker fell in both 2019 (by 2.9 per cent) and 2020 (minus 2 per cent) to recover by 3.5 per cent in 2021, China saw massive growth in these two years of 6.4 per cent and 6 per cent, respectively, slowing down to 3.6 per cent in 2021.

Vietnam recorded a similar trajectory for the same period.

Many people have responded to Murthy by saying workers need better pay given that Indian wages are among the lowest in the world.

According to Morgan Stanley Research, manufacturing wages here are \$0.8 per hour. In China, they are eight times higher, in Malaysia almost six times higher and in Vietnam twice as high. Only Indonesia at \$1 per hour was the closest to India out of the competing

countries.

The call for a 70-hour week also has to be put in the context of ILO data which shows that only three countries currently have a longer than 50-hour week. The UAE came out on top with over 52 hours.

Further, ILO's historical data from 13 countries (which include India, South Korea, and Brazil) show that China was the only country which had hit over 2,500 hours a year since the 1950s (Murthy suggests 3,640 days).

By 2000, no country did more than 2,000 hours a year as country after country introduced regulation to fix the working week. But a more detailed look at ILO data on the percentage of employed workers who work more than 49 hours a week shows some interesting trends.

Bangladesh tops the list with 50 per cent of the employed working more than 49 hours. In Indonesia it was 26 per cent, in the Philippines 19 per cent and in South Korea and Thailand it was over 17 per cent. (On this, data for India was not available with the ILO).