ets

INDIA SKILLS REPORT 2026

THE FUTURE OF WORK

GIG WORKFORCE, FREELANCING, AI SUPPLEMENTED WORKFORCE, REMOTE WORK & ENTREPRENEURSHIP

All India Council for Technical Education — AICTE

Confederation of Indian Industry

taggd

Association of Indian Universities


workers
digital
executives
pharmacy
commercial
printing
fleet
artists
escalator
ui
maintenance
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support
specialists
operators
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technicians
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cybersecurity
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editors
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installation
retail
delivery
social
refrigeration

Future of Work: Gig Workforce, Freelancing, AI Supplemented Workforce, Remote Work & Entrepreneurship

India Skills Report 2026

Future of Work: Gig Workforce, Freelancing, AI Supplemented Workforce, Remote Work & Entrepreneurship

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About the team

ETS is a global education and talent solutions organization enabling lifelong learners to be future ready. Our mission — advancing the science of measurement to power human progress — drives our focus on helping everyone, everywhere, demonstrate their skills and chart their path to future readiness for life. We are committed to readying 100M+ people for the next generation of jobs by 2035. We deliver on this commitment through trusted assessments and skills solutions — including TOEFL, TOEIC, GRE, Praxis and Futurenav — and groundbreaking initiatives powered by our Research Institute. With a global footprint including subsidiaries such as PSI, offices, and operations in more than 200 countries and territories, we help over 50 million individuals each year measure their proficiency and unlock new opportunities.

Institutional partner

All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) continues as a cornerstone of India's technical education ecosystem and a bridge to global academic alignment. Going into 2026, AICTE has rolled out Project PRACTICE, the AICTE Research Internship Portal, and established R&D & Climate Cells across all approved institutions to uplift 1,000 tier-2 and tier-3 engineering colleges, strengthening industry–academia collaboration.

Over the next three years, these efforts are slated to benefit 2 million students and 10,000 faculty members, narrowing skill gaps and fostering innovation. Presently, more than 30 lakh students across 5,868 engineering and diploma colleges have access to advanced AI tools and project-based learning.

Beyond infrastructure and tools, AICTE actively supports international engagement through exchange programs and global certifications, enabling cross-border academic pathways and reinforcing India's leadership in sustainable, tech-enabled education. In concert with institutions, industry, and global education networks, AICTE ensures that India's technical talent is both future-ready and globally connected.

India partner

Confederation of Indian Industry

The Confederation of Indian Industry works to create and sustain an environment conducive to the development of India, partnering Industry, Government and civil society through advisory and consultative processes.

For 130 years, CII has been engaged in shaping India's development journey and works proactively on transforming Indian Industry's engagement in national development. With its extensive network across the country and the world, CII serves as a reference point for Indian industry and the international business community.

In the journey of India's economic resurgence, CII facilitates the multifaceted contributions of the Indian Industry, charting a path towards a prosperous and sustainable future. With this backdrop, CII has identified "Accelerating Competitiveness: Globalisation, Inclusivity, Sustainability, Trust" as its theme for 2025-26, prioritising five key pillars. During the year, CII will align its initiatives to drive strategic action aimed at enhancing India's competitiveness by promoting global engagement, inclusive growth, sustainable practices, and a foundation of trust.

Knowledge partner

Taggd continues to transform India's talent acquisition landscape through its powerful combination of data intelligence, AI innovation, and human ingenuity.

With over 700,000 successful placements to date and a robust network of 700+ full-time recruiters serving 100+ customers across 14+ industries, Taggd has established itself as a trusted partner in connecting exceptional talent with transformative opportunities.

Operating from a dynamic database of 1.7 million active professionals, Taggd's platform harnesses advanced analytics and AI-driven insights to identify, assess, and match candidates with precision. This data-powered approach, enriched by deep human expertise, enables organizations to navigate the evolving talent market with confidence—whether hiring for emerging technologies, specialized sectors, or leadership positions.

As the Knowledge Partner for this year's "India Skills Report," Taggd brings invaluable intelligence on workforce trends, skill gaps, and hiring patterns across India's diverse industries. In an era where adaptability and continuous learning define career success, Taggd is not just filling positions but shaping career trajectories and helping organizations build future-ready teams. By bridging the gap between talent potential and market demand, Taggd is powering India's workforce transformation and reinforcing the nation's position as a global talent hub.

Research partner

As an academic 'think tank' organisation, AIU supports the Government as research-based policy advisory body with the wider mandate of taking up researchprojects on higher education policy, capacity building. It also acts as a bureau of information on higher education; liaise with international bodies and universities for internationalization of Indian higher education among many others. The Vision of AIU is to emerge as a dynamic service and apex advisory organization in India by undertaking such initiatives and programmes which could strengthen and popularize Indian higher education as leading-edge system in the world and promote greater national and international collaboration in Higher Education, Research, Extension, Sports, Youth and Cultural Activities. It is bestowed with the mission of promoting and representing the Indian Universities and other higher education institutions through strong liaison with the government and National/International organizations, sister associations world over and establish liaison between/among universities through active support, cooperation and coordination among the member universities and all its stakeholders for quality education, research and other academics and extension activities.

Acknowledgement

India Skills Report 2026

The Future of Work – Gig Workforce, Freelancing, AI-Supplemented Workforce, Remote Work & Entrepreneurship marks a defining moment in India's workforce transformation. This year's edition explores how India's youth, educators, and employers are adapting to new models of work driven by technology, flexibility, and innovation. Drawing insights from over **1 lakh candidates** who **participated in the Global Employability Test (G.E.T.)** and responses from more than 1,000+ organizations across 7 industries, the report provides a clear view of emerging trends shaping the future of employment.

We acknowledge the **All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE)** for its leadership in strengthening India's technical education system. Initiatives such as Project PRACTICE, the AICTE Research Internship Portal, and the new R&D and Climate Cells are enhancing skills, innovation, and industry collaboration for millions of students and faculty members across India.

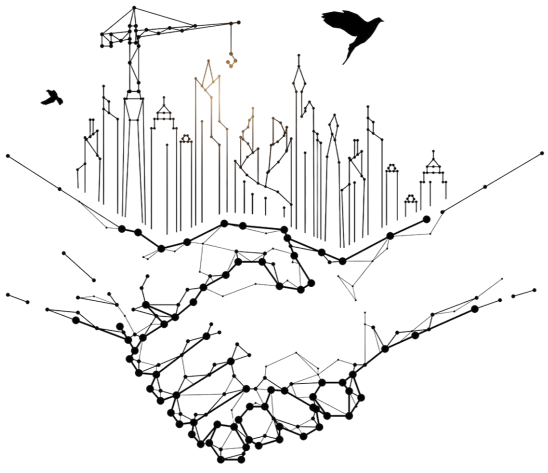
Our sincere thanks to the **Confederation of Indian Industry (CII)** for their continued support in connecting industry and academia. Through initiatives like Multi-Skill Institutes and Model Career Centres, CII's programs impact millions of youth every year and guide thousands of companies toward building globally employable talent.

Our gratitude also goes to the **Association of Indian Universities (AIU)** for advancing global academic partnerships and ensuring Indian degrees gain international recognition. Its expanding network of 650+ universities and efforts in joint research, credit transfer, and dual-degree programs are building strong international pathways for students and educators alike.

Our **Knowledge Partner, Taggd,** continues to contribute valuable data on hiring trends, emerging roles, and workforce behavior. With over 7,00,000 placements and deep insights into AI-driven talent acquisition, Taggd's research strengthens our understanding of how digital tools are reshaping recruitment and work models. We acknowledge the invaluable support of our State Partners who are driving transformations at the roots of society and integral to the growth of India on the global stage. This year's partners are:

- Additional Skill Acquisition Programme, Kerala
- Jammu & Kashmir
- Department of Skill Development, Entrepreneurship & Livelihood (SDEL), Karnataka
- Tamil Nadu Skill Development Corporation (TNSDC)
- Bihar Skill Development Mission

Finally, we extended our gratitude to all participating students, educators, institutions, and industry leaders for their contribution to this year's report. Your collaboration and tireless dedication helps capture how India's workforce is evolving, embracing flexibility, AI innovation, next-gen tools, and new forms of work.



The journey of India Skills Report

The India **Skills Report 2026:** *The Future of Work – Gig Workforce, Freelancing, AI-Supplemented Workforce, Remote Work & Entrepreneurship* widens the aperture from domestic employability to globally mobile, platform-enabled workforce. Now in its 13th year, the report blends outcomes from lakhs of candidates taking the Global Employability Test (G.E.T.) with hiring intent from 1,000+ organizations to chart how India's talent is moving into flexible work models, AI-intensive roles, and founder pathways. India continues to deepen its AI base, holding roughly 16% of the world's AI talent and a fast-growing pool of 600k+ AI professionals, with the local AI market projected to reach $17B by 2027. Enterprise adoption is broad with over 9 in 10 employees in India using GenAI tools, reinforcing the shift toward human-AI collaboration. Parallel tailwinds include resilient FDI inflows into services, software, and manufacturing, and ongoing skilling drives that link campuses to high-demand, digital roles. Together, these forces position India to supply agile talent for platform work, remote projects, and global mandates.

This year's analysis traces three instrumental arcs shaping the next decade of work.

1. **Skills:** Demand for AI, data, cybersecurity and cloud continues to outpace supply; multiple trackers point to annual double-digit growth in AI roles and a widening need for upskilling, with India's AI talent base projected to reach ~1.25 million by 2027.
2. **Work models:** India's platform and gig workforce is projected to touch ~23.5 million by 2029–30, expanding across skill tiers and enabling entry-level and specialist participation alike.
3. **Mobility:** As global firms rebalance cost, speed, and innovation, India's digitally fluent talent and improving investment climate (services and computer software/hardware among the top FDI recipients) create stronger corridors for remote delivery, cross-border contracting, and entrepreneurship.

Readers will find year-on-year employability views, demand signals across future-of-work platforms, and practical recommendations to align education, policy, and industry, so learners, workers, and employers can navigate AI-supplemented roles, fluid careers, and new markets with confidence.

As India continues to redefine its role in the global talent economy, India Skills Report 2026 serves as both a reflection and a roadmap for progress. The nation stands at a turning point where skills, innovation, and technology converge to shape a more dynamic, inclusive, and sustainable future of work. This year's report is an invitation for educators to reimagine curricula, for industries to integrate AI responsibly, for policymakers to enable flexible and fair work models, and for investors to fuel innovation that balances growth with equity. Together, these efforts will determine how India scales its human capital advantage, fostering a culture of lifelong learning and entrepreneurial drive that powers the world's next generation of digital talent.

Foreword

Amit Sevak
CEO, ETS

India's Workforce Revolution: The Gig Economy, AI and Skill-Driven Growth

The world of work is undergoing a profound transformation at an unprecedented pace. The surge in AI adoption, along with the explosive rise of freelancing, gig opportunities, and digital entrepreneurship, is fundamentally redefining career paths and reshaping the foundations of the global workforce.

At the center of this evolution stands an India whose labor force is young, skilled, and ready to lead.
In fact, this latest India Skills Report affirms that India's gig workforce, currently estimated at over 12 million, is projected to surpass 23 million by 2030. Project-based hiring has grown nearly 40%, signaling the mainstreaming of flexible, skill-centric employment.

The 2026 India Skills Report: "The Future of Work: Gig Economy, Freelancing, AI-Supplemented Workforce & Entrepreneurship," shows that hiring in India is being defined by sustained growth, AI-led recruitment, regional spread of opportunities, and hybrid talent strategies. All of this signaling a mature, digitally integrated labor market ready for the next phase of AI-driven transformation.

Without question, India's workforce is evolving, and five key hiring trends have emerged:

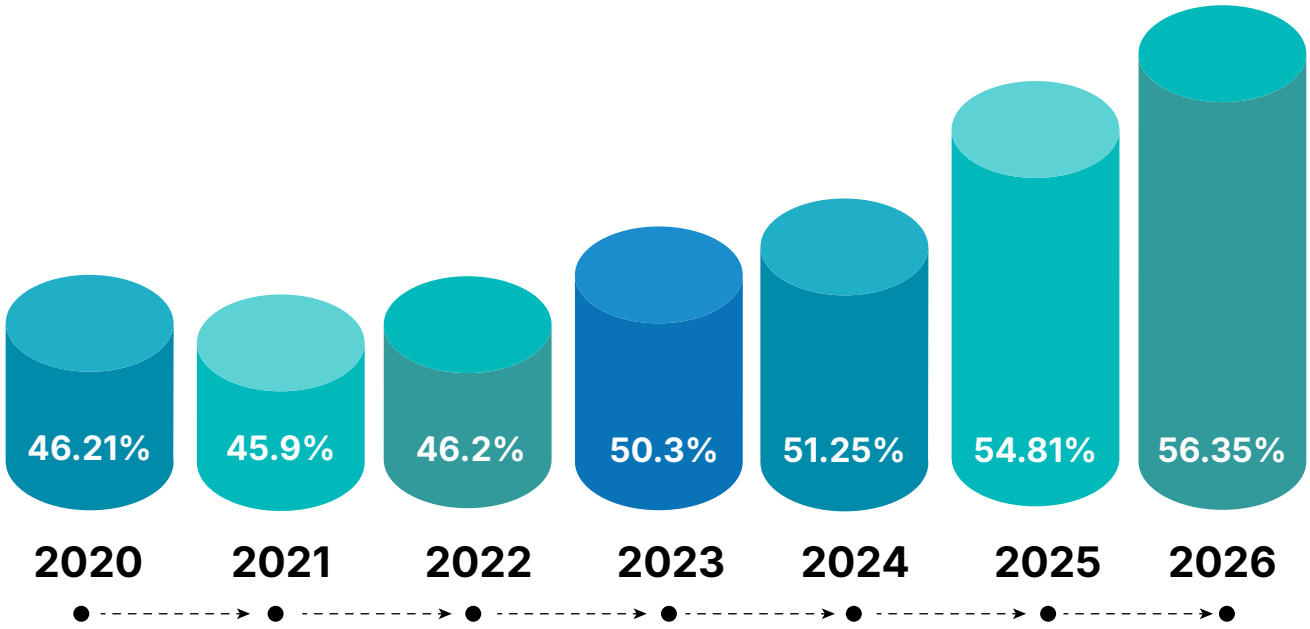
- **The state of hiring in India is strong:** Organizations in India project 40% of total planned hires to be new roles in FY 2026–27; up significantly from 29% last year, reflecting sustained expansion and business confidence
- **Fresher hiring is fueling IT growth:** The IT sector dominates fresher hiring at 35%, up from a 14% cross-industry average last year.
- **AI is changing recruitment:** 70% of IT companies and 50% of Banking, Financial Services, and Insurance (BFSI) firms have implemented AI in their recruitment practices, a massive jump from last year's pilot stages.
- **Tier 2 and 3 cities are emerging as hiring hubs:** Across India, cities like Coimbatore, Indore, Surat, Trichy, and Mysore are witnessing rising employment demand.
- **Flexible and skill-based work is the new normal:** The rising tide of internal mobility and flexible work models show a shift from linear employment to skill-based mobility and hybrid work ecosystems.

From coders in Coimbatore to entrepreneurs in Pune, India's talent is shaping the new global order of work. This year's report reveals clear signs that India's workforce transformation is being driven by skill-centered growth, inclusive innovation, and AI-led practices that fuel employment, employability, and readiness for what's next. As India continues to embrace these dynamic changes, it stands poised to become a model for workforce agility and digital integration. The nation's journey signals not just adaptation, but leadership in the future of work worldwide.

Unveiling of India Skills Report 2026

HOW EMPLOYABILITY HAS CHANGED OVER THE YEARS

2020 - 2026



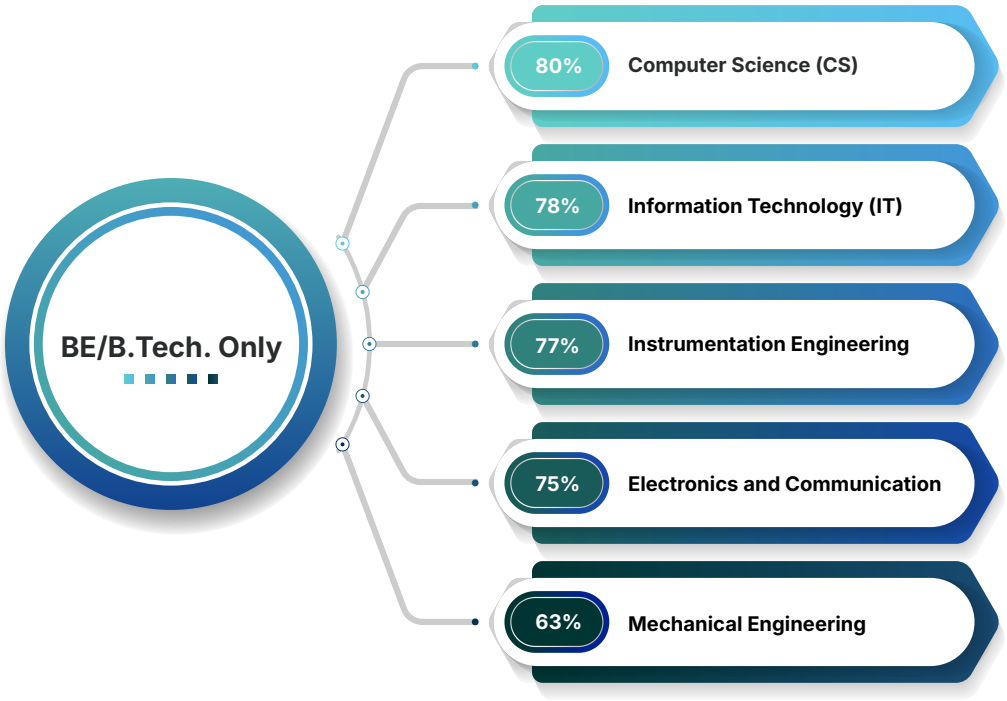
WHICH DOMAIN HAVE MORE EMPLOYABLE TALENT

2020 - 2026

DOMAIN	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
B.E/B.Tech	49	46.82	55.15	57.44	64.67	71.50	70.15
MBA	54	46.59	55.09	60.1	71.16	78	72.76
B.Arts	48	42.72	44.2	49.2	47.11	54	55.55
B.Com	47	40.3	42.62	60.62	48.12	55	62.81
B.Sc	34	30.34	38.06	37.69	51.27	58	61.00
MCA	25	22.42	29.3	30.64	64.63	71	68.25
ITI	NA	NA	31.3	34.2	40	41	45.95
Polytechnic	32	25.0	21.42	27.61	22.37	29	32.92
B.Pharma	45	37.24	44.63	57.51	54	56	58.00

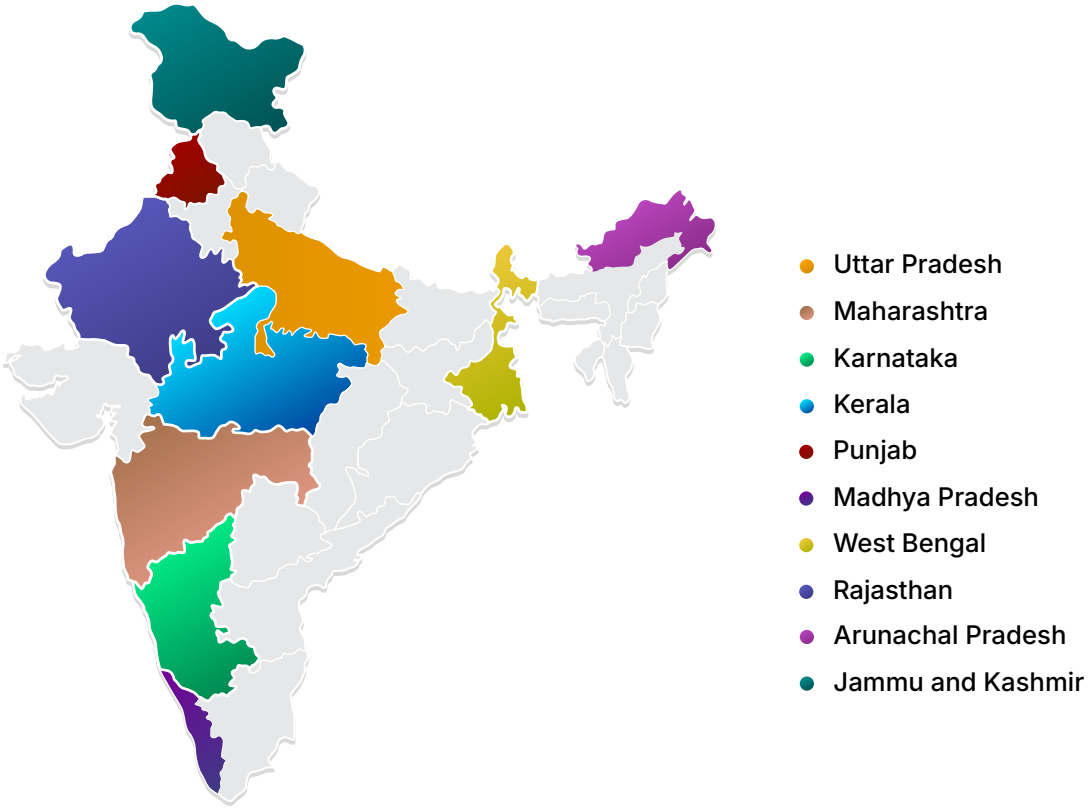
DOMAIN WISE EMPLOYABILITY

2020 - 2026



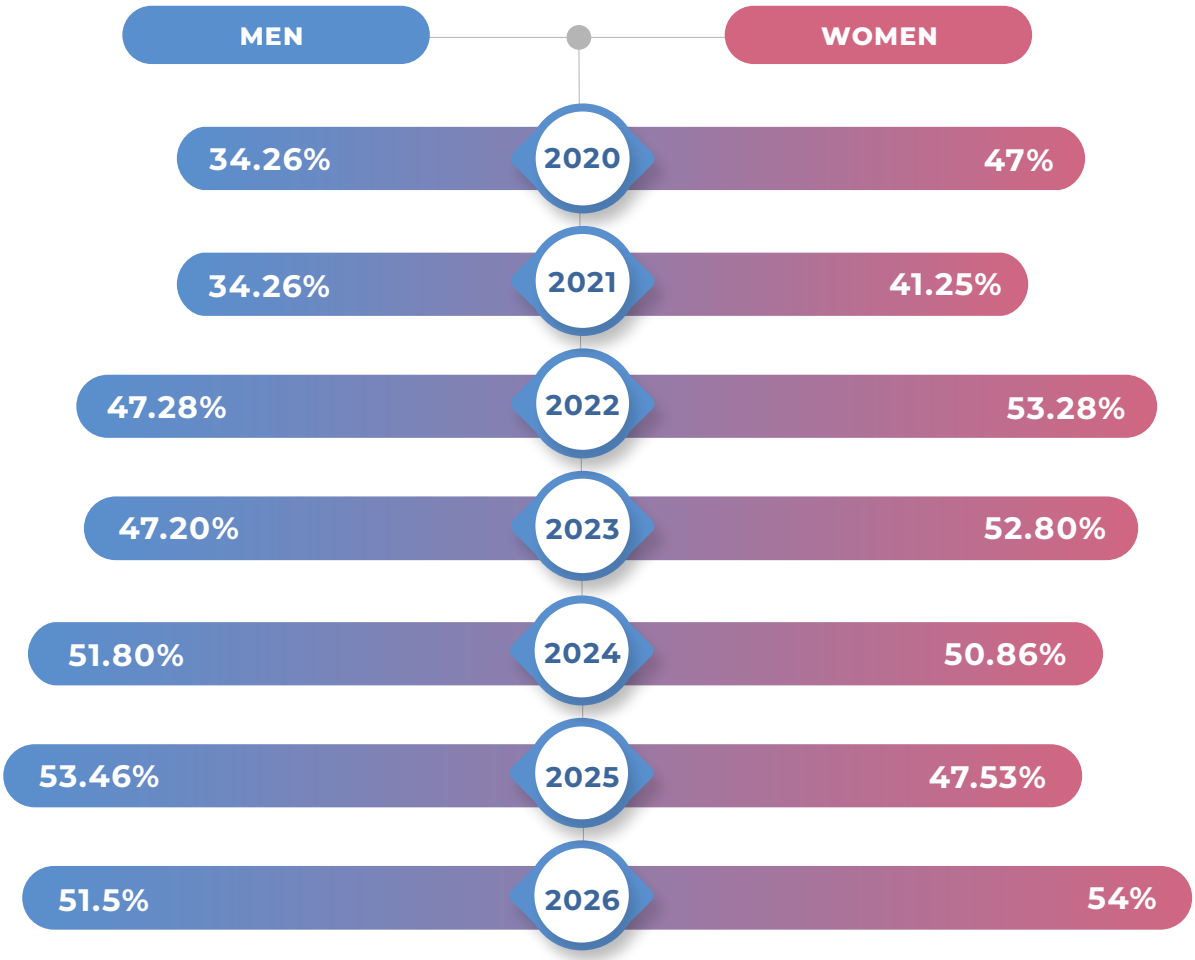
STATES WITH HIGHEST EMPLOYABILITY

2020 - 2026



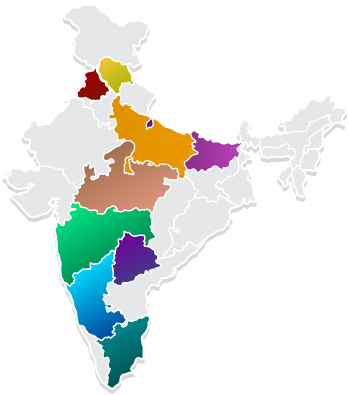
MEN VS WOMEN EMPLOYABILITY

2020 - 2026



TOP 10 PREFERRED STATES TO WORK BY MALE USERS ACROSS INDIA

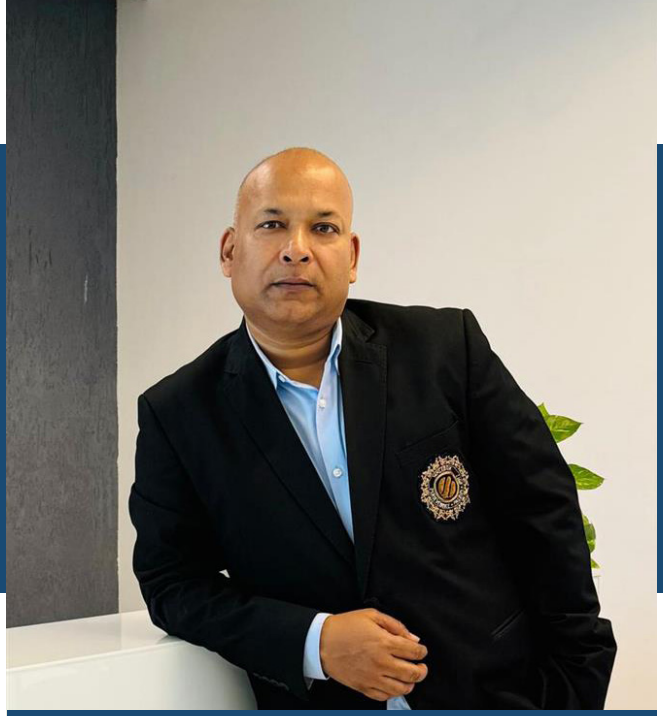
- Uttar Pradesh
- Madhya Pradesh
- Maharashtra
- Karnataka
- Punjab
- Delhi
- Himachal Pradesh
- Telangana
- Bihar
- Tamil Nadu



TOP 10 PREFERRED STATES TO WORK BY FEMALE USERS ACROSS INDIA

- Rajasthan
- Kerala
- Telangana
- Andhra Pradesh
- Punjab
- Bihar
- Maharashtra
- Tamil Nadu
- Uttar Pradesh
- Karnataka

The future of work redefined



Nirmal Singh
CEO, WHEEBOX ETS

The world of work is entering a decisive reset. Technology, demographic momentum, climate transition, and new production models around AI are redrawing hiring maps, wage curves, and skill portfolios. Employers surveyed across 22 industries expect nearly one in five roles to change meaningfully by 2030, with 170 million positions created and 92 million displaced for a net gain of 78 million jobs worldwide. AI, big data, and analytical creativity accelerate; clerical and routine-processing tasks recede. Leaders face a clear brief and that's to align strategy, skills, and systems to a market that rewards speed, evidence, and adaptability as evidenced by the World Economic Forum, The Future of Jobs Report 2025.

India's opportunity rises from scale and timing. India contributes a dominant share of global working-age growth toward mid-century, sharpening its role as a supplier of digitally fluent talent and a destination for platform-enabled services. Expanded employability hinges on inclusive pathways that connect learning to earning, particularly in green energy, healthcare, education, logistics, and AI-intensive services.

Signals from the ground confirm the pivot. Project-based hiring in India rose 38 percent in FY25, reflecting demand for outcome-focused engagements across technology, consulting, and operations. Freelance and gig channels, once tactical, now anchor capacity planning for peak demand, specialized sprints, and rapid market tests.

AI's economic footprint compounds the shift. Global AI spending advances from hundreds of billions today to the trillion-dollar range by decade's end, while a majority of large enterprises move from pilots to production. Wage effects follow exposure as more roles are augmented by AI resulting in faster earnings growth and expanded career lattices, while roles insulated from augmentation confront slower progression and tighter demand.

Organizationally, teams reconfigure around products and platforms. Success looks like three reinforcing moves in policy and corporate responsibility:

- **Measure:** define outcomes, instrument workflows, and publish talent telemetry.
- **Modularize:** break large programs into sprints staffed by cross-functional "pods."
- **Mobilize:** blend employees, independent professionals, and AI agents with clear governance.

The policy canvas must keep pace, as portable benefits, skill-verified credentials, cross-border tax clarity, and data protection norms underpin trust for platform work and remote mobility. Governments that modernize labour statistics to count platform workers, track remote exports, and index skill supply create sharper signals for education and industry.

For employers, the agenda concentrates on capability over headcount, as skills-first hiring, role redesign, generative-AI literacy, and manager coaching raise productivity and resilience. For educators, curricula move toward projects, portfolios, and verifiable competencies. For workers, portfolio careers replace linear ladders; reputation and outcomes travel across platforms and borders.

This section frames the stakes and the scale. The pages that follow examine the evolving contracts of work, the rise of gig and AI-supplemented models, and the economics behind India's accelerating platform adoption, creating a bridge to sectoral deep dives and mobility maps in later chapters of the India Skills Report 2025.

Engines of change: economics, technology & investment

Three engines propel the new labour economy and they are AI diffusion, infrastructure investment, and platformization of talent markets. Together, they recast utilization, wage growth, and regional competitiveness.

AI Diffusion: By mid-decade, nearly three-quarters of organizations report using or piloting AI, with roughly one-third deploying at scale. Productivity arrives through co-pilots, automated data prep, decision support, and code generation; value compounds when leaders move from tooling to re-designed workflows. And for good reason. Workers in AI-exposed sectors experience faster wage gains, reinforcing the premium on augmentation literacy.

Investment Super-cycle: Digital, physical, and green capital formation drives jobs and skills. Global technology outlays expand materially through 2030, with IT services capturing a growing share. Energy transition projects add employment across renewables, grid modernization, and storage, including infrastructure accelerators, lift construction, logistics, and advanced manufacturing as reported by findings of McKinsey and evidenced by the World Bank.

Platformization: Talent marketplaces and remote-work rails compress search frictions, spread opportunity to Tier-2/3 cities, and create liquid access to niche skills. India's surge in project-based hiring mirrors this liquidity: firms orchestrate benches from blended sources, while professionals convert expertise into portable micro-businesses.

Leadership in the AI-supplemented workforce

A practical leadership lens emerges, fueled by global industrialists and analysts closely monitoring the rapidly changing workforce dynamics:

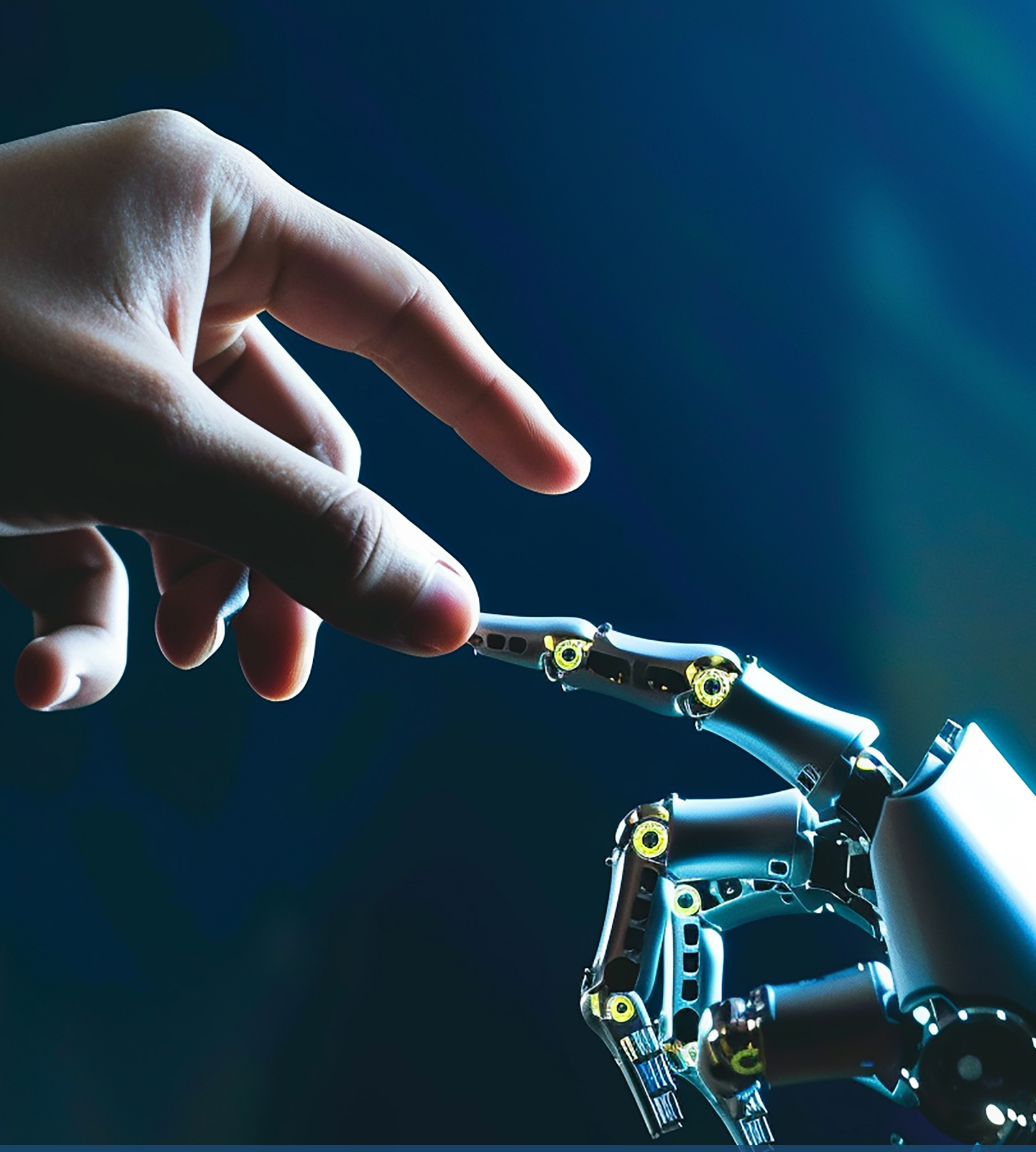
- **From pilots to platforms:** move beyond tool trials; codify AI-assisted standards in service desks, finance closes, customer ops, and software delivery.
- **Skills as balance-sheet assets:** budget for reskilling with the same discipline as capital spending; publish internal skill liquidity metrics.
- **Measure the middle:** track cycle time, error rates, and decision latency in the "intangible middle" where AI and humans co-produce outcomes.

Caution accompanies growth signals

For India, these engines translate into tangible sectoral currents as GenAI in IT services, telemedicine and health data in care delivery, solar and storage in renewables, EV supply chains in mobility, semiconductor design and OSAT in electronics and much more. Hiring intent maps to these currents, lifting demand for data, cloud, cybersecurity, product management, and AI safety to name a few emerging roles across corporate offices.

A caution accompanies the upside as adoption gaps become visible across sectors despite the competitive nature of modern industry. Leaders cite urgency; training lags. Less than two in five organizations provide AI training at scale, even as workflows change. Addressing this gap requires modular curricula, practice-based credentials, and manager coaching that normalizes AI-assisted work.

These economics set the scene for employment paradigms, as we further trace how structures, contracts, and cultures evolve when work becomes outcome-based and ecosystems replace silos.



The dynamics of the future of work

Evolving paradigms of work & employment

Work reorganizes around missions, not departments. Hybrid patterns mature, remote collaboration normalizes, and AI augments judgment at the edge of every role. Three paradigm shifts define the moment.

1. **From hierarchies to networks:** Decision rights migrate closer to customers and code as AI trims layers between signal and action, shrinking middle-management spans and accelerating escalation paths. Teams assemble as cross-functional "pods" with product owners, engineers, designers, analysts, and compliance embedded from the start.

2. **From tenure to skill currency:** Employers compete on capability liquidity, like how quickly they can discover, verify, and deploy skills across products and regions. Globally, a majority of workers require reskilling by 2030, since core skills shift materially as automation advances. Lifelong learning becomes a performance expectation and leaders are keen on taking advantage of this transformative potential.

3. **From place to platform:** Flexibility travels from perk to policy, as a large share of Indian startup roles run fully remote, widening access to Tier-2/3 cities and caregivers. Remote-first firms report stronger applicant pipelines and faster time-to-hire.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion programs expand alongside these shifts because nobody should be left behind in the race to unlock AI's potential for humanity. Employers raise ambitions for representation and accessibility, add measurement, and link leadership incentives to progress. Culture becomes infrastructure, fashioning rituals, feedback loops, and transparent metrics to maintain cohesion in distributed settings.

Paradigm snapshot of business evolution

Leaders who thrive set crisp "rules of engagement" for human-AI handoffs, publish skill taxonomies, and invest in manager capability to coach in an augmented environment. Governance modernizes as well through privacy, model risk, and audit trails integrated into daily operations rather than sitting in periodic reviews.

DIMENSION	LEGACY MODEL	EMERGING MODEL
STRUCTURE	Functional hierarchies	Networked pods around products and customers
DECISION LOOP	Managerial gatekeeping	Data-assisted, edge-empowered
TALENT MIX	Full-time dominant	Employees + independents + AI agents
PERFORMANCE	Activity metrics	Outcome metrics and cycle time
LEARNING	Event-based training	Continuous, project-embedded upskilling
WORK LOCATION	On-site first	Hybrid/remote with asynchronous norms

India's advantage compounds under these shifting paradigms. With remote-ready infrastructure, a maturing assessment ecosystem, and vibrant platform marketplaces expand access for early-career talent and experienced specialists alike, the future of industry turns from structure to motion. The coming sections further explores how gig, freelance, AI-supplemented, and remote models reshape labour allocation and career arcs, and redefine the way we work.

The new work stack: AI, gig & borderless collaboration

Flexible work has crossed the adoption threshold, with global estimates placing online gig participation into the hundreds of millions, and a rising share of high-skill projects in software, design, data, and product marketing. Consequently, revenue pools deepen as enterprises tap independent talent for speed and specialization. Paired with increased AI adoption and improved access to top notch education, India's talent is benefitting from emerging industry expectations.

AI introduces a second dynamic through augmentation in supply chains. Data labeling, RLHF evaluation, synthetic data curation, AI safety reviews, and domain prompting open new categories of paid work that flex with model cycles. Demand spikes near launches, then settles into continuous improvement loops, rewarding contributors who pair domain depth with tool fluency.

Remote rails furnish the third dynamic, ushering collaboration platforms, global payroll solutions, and compliance services to compress the distance between a project in Frankfurt and a developer in Coimbatore. Startup ecosystems capitalize with ; a substantial proportion of roles run fully remote, creating fresh pathways for caregivers and graduates from India following the nation's widening industrial footprint. Let's take a look at three transformations that are carving the trajectory of business operations widely practiced across sectors.

Operating model comparison

MODEL	STRENGTHS	RISKS	OPPORTUNITY
EMPLOYEE CENTRIC	Institutional memory, culture continuity	Slower capacity flex, higher fixed costs	Improved governance
PLATFORM BLENDED	Speed, specialization, variable cost	Vendor sprawl, governance complexity	Specialized expertise
AI SUPPLEMENTED	Throughput, consistency, discoverability of ideas	Model risk, bias, over-automation	Operational agility

Productivity rests on orchestration

The key to operational agility in the AI age is to define what work lives where, design human-AI handoffs, and clarify IP terms across contributors. Further, leaders must build portable credentials and outcome-based reputation systems so independent talent can move across projects without resetting trust from scratch.

With dynamics mapped, attention turns to the sectors that concentrate demand, and the frontrunners are technology, energy, healthcare, EVs, and semiconductors, introducing new platforms that route opportunity at scale.

Sector signals: where demand accelerates

Hiring momentum concentrates where transformation budgets run hottest. Five sectors set the tempo for 2025–26 and here are some findings based on the latest research.

- **AI & advanced digital:** Product engineering, GenAI integration, data platforms, and cybersecurity dominate requisitions. Demand for ML engineers, data scientists, and AI safety specialists rises sharply as salary bands stretch for scarce roles.
- **Renewable energy:** Solar, wind, grid digitalization, and storage unlock multidisciplinary hiring, with electrical engineering, project finance, geospatial analytics, and field operations gaining more prominence. Workforce development aligns with multi-year project pipelines to build more opportunities for India's talent.
- **Healthcare tech:** Telemedicine, health data interoperability, and virtual clinical operations require clinicians with data literacy, health informaticians, and

platform engineers. Credential management and privacy compliance remain core competencies in an increasingly AI-first world.

- **Electric mobility:** Battery engineering, charging infra, vehicle software, and supply-chain resilience push demand for embedded developers, power electronics, and logistics planners.
- **Semiconductors:** Design, verification, and pilot fabrication expand roles in EDA tooling, DFT, and advanced packaging. Vendor ecosystems deepen with cross-training from adjacent electronics disciplines and accelerates the promise of government-led initiatives like Make in India.

Next-gen platforms capture the big picture

Talent networks and HR technology route specialized skills to mission-critical programs, while global payroll and compliance partners enable frictionless onboarding across jurisdictions. Leaders that pair sector fluency with platform orchestration see faster cycle times and higher project yield, impacting ROI, adoption curves, and employee experience metrics that quantify business impact.

Readiness, risk & the new social contract: We've always heard that the higher the risk, the higher the reward. But that's about to change. The future rewards readiness. The risks cluster where measurable goals are ignored.

Readiness: Organizations that publish skill maps, invest in AI literacy, and standardize augmented workflows report quicker time-to-value and steadier engagement. Workers who maintain portable portfolios and verifiable credentials navigate opportunity with confidence (*IBM, AI Upskilling Insights study*).

Risk: Adoption gaps persist as many leaders signal urgency, while training and governance lag. Model risk, privacy, and bias demand continuous oversight with; platform work requires protections that keep pace with innovation a (*BCG's AI Is Outpacing Your Workforce Strategy*).

The social contract

A modern company balances flexibility with security as:

Portable benefits: health, insurance, and retirement instruments that travel across engagements.

Fair work protocols: transparent ratings, appeal mechanisms, and dispute resolution on platforms.

Mobility enablers: tax clarity, mutual recognition of credentials, and lawful remote frameworks.

Countries that move first on these enablers attract projects, retain talent, and accelerate formalization in the platform economy, confirms the *World Bank in its latest Global Economic Prospects publication.*

Leadership playbook: what leaders in the AI era expect

1. **Instrument outcomes:** track throughput, quality, and cycle time rather than activity counts.
2. **Default to skills:** write requisitions against competencies and recruit through assessments and portfolios.
3. **Coach for augmentation:** equip managers to redesign tasks and feedback in AI-assisted contexts.
4. **Design for inclusion:** build remote-ready norms, accessible tools, and flexible schedules that widen participation.

From macro forces to analyzing Future of Work cartography and discovering shifting patterns in global talent mobility, the following sections of this year's report further delve into major sectors and emerging workforce platforms with precise adoption and ROI analytics.

Momentum to mastery: a bridge to what comes next

India stands at the confluence of youthful scale, digital ambition, and platform liquidity. Employers feel the tailwinds, with shorter hiring cycles, richer skill access, and higher project velocity, and when strategy, skills, and systems align an industrialist's dream comes true. Workers feel the agency, encouraging greater transparency, wider choice, and faster progression, as credentials carry across borders and platforms.

As per industry leaders and economic architects of the to day, three imperatives shape the path from momentum to mastery:

- **Make skills visible:** The World Economic Forum urges businesses to standardize taxonomies, verify competencies through trusted assessments, and publish internal markets for talent to move where demand peaks.
- **Scale human-AI collaboration:** Move from tool trials to workflow redesign, from pilots to platforms, from pockets to enterprise standards, suggests McKinsey in the Superagency in the Workplace study.
- **Modernize the compact:** Legislate portability, codify fair platform practices, and enable lawful remote exports to monetize India's skill surplus.

The future rewards those who learn quickly, measure relentlessly, and design work for human-AI synergy. India possesses the ingredients and the chapters ahead convert them into blueprints with a deep dive in the tailwinds behind advancing workplace technology.

Major sectors & emerging workforce platforms

The workforce platform revolution in India

India's workforce landscape is undergoing one of the most rapid digital transformations in the world. As organizations rewire for agility, compliance, and inclusion, workforce management software (WFM), human resource management systems (HRMS), and human capital management (HCM) platforms have become the invisible engines of this shift. They are redefining how organizations recruit, onboard, train, engage, and retain talent across industries.

In 2025, over 90 percent of large IT firms in India adopted cloud-based HR and workforce management systems, while similar adoption across manufacturing, BFSI, healthcare, and retail reached 70 percent, marking a fundamental modernization of human capital operations. Platforms such as Darwinbox, PeopleStrong, SAP SuccessFactors, Oracle HCM Cloud, Workday, Zoho People, Keka, and GreytHR now anchor enterprise-scale digital HR ecosystems.

These systems not only streamline payroll and attendance but enable predictive analytics, AI-powered attrition modeling, and continuous employee engagement, turning HR from a support function into a strategic driver of productivity. As India's HRMS market grows from USD 9.7 billion in 2025 to a projected USD 22.4 billion by 2035, the country's workforce transformation is becoming a defining global benchmark.

Workforce platforms are now the foundation of India's new work economy, aligning talent to value in a world where agility is the new advantage.

Key functions driving adoption

FUNCTION	TRANSFORMATION VIA PLATFORMS	IMPACT ON ORGANIZATIONS
ONBOARDING & INTEGRATION	Automated workflows reduce joining time from 14 days to under 5 days.	Faster productivity, reduced HR workload.
PAYROLL & COMPLIANCE	Real-time statutory updates for PF/ESI/TDS ensure zero manual errors.	Regulatory fines drop by up to 30%.
ENGAGEMENT & RETENTION	AI-driven pulse surveys and recognition tools improve morale.	Engagement scores rise 12–15%.
WORKFORCE ANALYTICS	Attrition modeling and predictive hiring.	Savings of up to $180,723 annually for mid-sized firms.

India's businesses are realizing measurable returns, achieving 20–35 percent productivity improvements, 50 percent reduction in manual errors, and a 15 percent rise in retention among companies with mature workforce digitalization, as reported in the *Business Standard*.

The next decade will see HR technology integrated deeper with AI, generative analytics, and immersive training. For employees, that means greater transparency, mobility, and empowerment. For organizations, it means higher ROI, simultaneous adaptability, and data-backed workforce strategies.

Technology, IT services & BFSI: the era of AI-driven efficiency

The IT and BFSI sectors are the vanguard of India's workforce modernization. With globally distributed teams and stringent compliance needs, these sectors have embraced cloud-based platforms to manage scale, security, and workforce engagement.

Information technology

IT firms, from large enterprises like Infosys and TCS to fast-growing SaaS startups, are implementing Darwinbox, PeopleStrong, SAP SuccessFactors, and Workday to unify employee experiences. As of 2025, NASSCOM reports that 92 percent of large IT companies in India are using AI-powered HRMS tools, automating onboarding, shift scheduling, and time tracking to cut integration times by up to 60 percent.

Employee self-service features, available via mobile and chatbots, have raised satisfaction scores by 12–14 percent as recorded by Darwinbox, while predictive attrition modeling tools have reduced rehiring costs by as much as USD 170,400 annually in mid-sized firms.

Beyond HR automation, the integration of AI and workforce analytics is enabling talent visibility across projects, especially in hybrid and global delivery teams. This transparency supports agile staffing and utilization, key for India's position as a digital services leader.

Banking, financial services & insurance (BFSI)

In BFSI, platforms such as Oracle HCM Cloud, ADP Workforce Now, and SAP SuccessFactors are reshaping compliance and performance management. As regulations tighten, automation is preventing risk and ensuring accountability. Regulatory fines in BFSI have dropped 27 percent since 2023, attributed to automated compliance updates and audit trails, says the Reserve Bank of India.

Moreover, the latest PeopleStrong report reveals that banks adopting real-time learning and certification platforms have seen a 24 percent increase in continuous upskilling, strengthening digital literacy among customer-facing teams.

The implications are far-reaching: digital HR and workforce platforms are no longer back-office tools but engin-es of strategy. For IT, this means better global project alignment and cost optimization. For BFSI, it ensures trust, governance, and compliance in an increasingly data-driven economy.

Platform adoption impact in IT & BFSI

SECTOR	ADOPTION RATE (2025)	TOP PLATFORMS	ADOPTION RATE (2025)
IT & Software	92%	Darwinbox, SAP, Workday, PeopleStrong	Integration speed, remote team alignment, retention.
BFSI	80%	Oracle, ADP, SAP, PeopleStrong	Regulatory compliance, reduced fraud, employee upskilling.

Manufacturing,infrastructure, and healthcare: where automation meets safety

The manufacturing, infrastructure, and healthcare sectors have traditionally been labor-intensive, compliance-heavy, and operationally complex. In 2025–26, these sectors are converging around digital workforce transformation, with platforms like Oracle HCM, Darwinbox, GreytHR, and Workday enabling automation at scale.

Manufacturing & infrastructure

India's manufacturing sector, at a projection to reach USD 500 billion by 2030 and expanding through initiatives like Make in India and PLI 2.0, is leveraging HR technology to improve efficiency and accountability. Workforce platforms now automate shift optimization, attendance, safety reporting, and training, reducing overtime costs by 20–35 percent as reported by the Manufacturing Digital Transformation Index 2025, *CII–EY Report.*

Inline compliance with the Factories Act and PF/ESI/TDS reporting minimizes audit failures and saves USD 2,272–USD 5,680 per site annually, while predictive analytics ensure workforce deployment aligns with production cycles. Employee satisfaction has improved significantly with digital safety modules and easier access to leave and pay records.

Healthcare & pharmaceuticals

Healthcare organizations face unique challenges, credential management, 24/7 staffing, and regulatory documentation. Platforms like Workday and Quikchex are transforming workforce agility by cutting HR operations costs by 31 percent and onboarding new clinical staff 3–4 times faster as per the latest FICCI HealthTech Review.

Digital credentialing and compliance verification ensure qualified staff are deployed efficiently across hospitals and telehealth networks. These improvements have reduced burnout and improved patient outcomes, linking workforce management directly with quality of care.

Notable platform benefits across sectors

SECTOR	EFFICIENCY GAINS	COMPLIANCE IMPROVEMENT	EMPLOYEE IMPACT
MANUFACTURING	35%	High (20–35% less audit failure)	Improved safety & morale
HEALTHCARE	31%	Strong credential management	Faster onboarding & reduced burnout
INFRASTRUCTURE	28%	Seamless payroll & attendance	Field team visibility, better planning

These transformations reinforce a larger truth, that technology is not replacing workers, but protecting and empowering them. In sectors that employ millions, these platforms improve job dignity, safety, and stability, becoming cornerstones of India's evolving industrial identity.

Retail, E-commerce & public enterprises: scalability & trust uncompromised

Retail & E-commerce

The retail and e-commerce boom in India has made workforce flexibility critical. Platforms such as Keka, GreytHR, and Zoho People have redefined how these sectors manage frontline employees. With attendance automation reducing errors by 65 percent and payroll cycles 42 percent faster, the *ET Retail Workforce Study 2025* reveals that companies can now scale rapidly during high-demand periods such as festivals and sales.

This study further expands that self-service scheduling, instant pay, and digital recognition have improved frontline retention by 13 percent, especially among gig and contract workers. The ability to track performance in real time ensures fair evaluations, improving motivation and brand loyalty.

Government & public sector

India's public sector, employing over 20 million people, is also modernizing. Government departments and PSUs adopting SAP SuccessFactors, Oracle HCM, and customized HRMS platforms report a 70 percent reduction in paper-based administration and improved transparency as surveyed by the *Digital Governance in India Report* by MeitY in 2025.

Live analytics enhance policy deployment and fraud control across large networks like Indian Railways and public banking systems. These digital systems are also enabling flexible work models and hybrid arrangements for administrative roles, fostering a new culture of accountability and morale.

Sectoral workforce gains

SECTOR	EFFICIENCY GAINS	ERROR REDUCTION	ENGAGEMENT/ RETENTION
RETAIL/ E-COMMERCE	42%	65%	+13%
GOVERNMENT/ PUBLIC ENTERPRISE	70%	50%	+10%

Together, these advances demonstrate that India's workforce transformation is not confined to the private sector. It is a nationwide shift in how work is organized, measured, and rewarded, establishing a system anchored in transparency, data, and trust.

Impact, innovations & the road to 2026

The rise of workforce platforms goes beyond being a digital shift, but emerges as a cultural and industrial necessity impacting every stakeholder inviting AI-led growth.

Employees

AI-powered HRMS tools democratize access to feedback, learning, and rewards, enabling individuals to own their growth. As more companies adopt self-service systems and instant pay tools, employees experience a sense of agency and belonging. The challenge lies in ensuring inclusivity, equipping all workers, from gig to government, with digital literacy and social protections.

Businesses

Companies that adopt cloud HRMS report up to 35 percent productivity gains and 50 percent fewer administrative errors as per findings in theDarwinbox India Productivity Index survey from 2025. Agile, data-driven HR models also support hybrid work, resilience, and better decision-making. The focus is shifting from transactional efficiency to strategic foresight, by relying only on people costs but people impact.

Platform providers

For technology innovators, the competition is intensifying. The next generation of HR platforms will integrate generative AI, voice analytics, and blockchain for credentialing.

Local providers like Darwinbox, Keka, and Zoho are challenging global giants with cost-effective, culturally aware solutions. India's homegrown HR-tech ecosystem is becoming an export industry, powering workforce systems for global enterprises. With platforms like Zoho gaining national prominence over the years, public sectors have been urged to adopt home-grown tools to position India as a leader in industrial innovation.

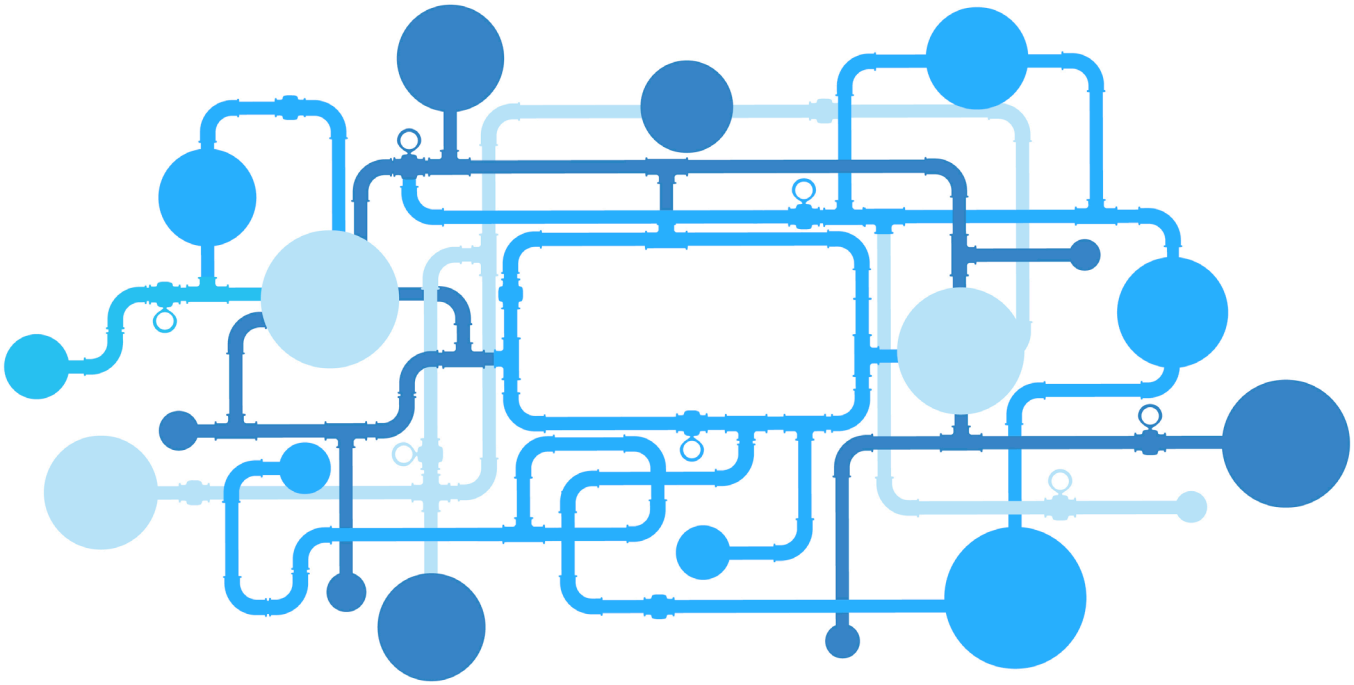
Building AI-human synergy

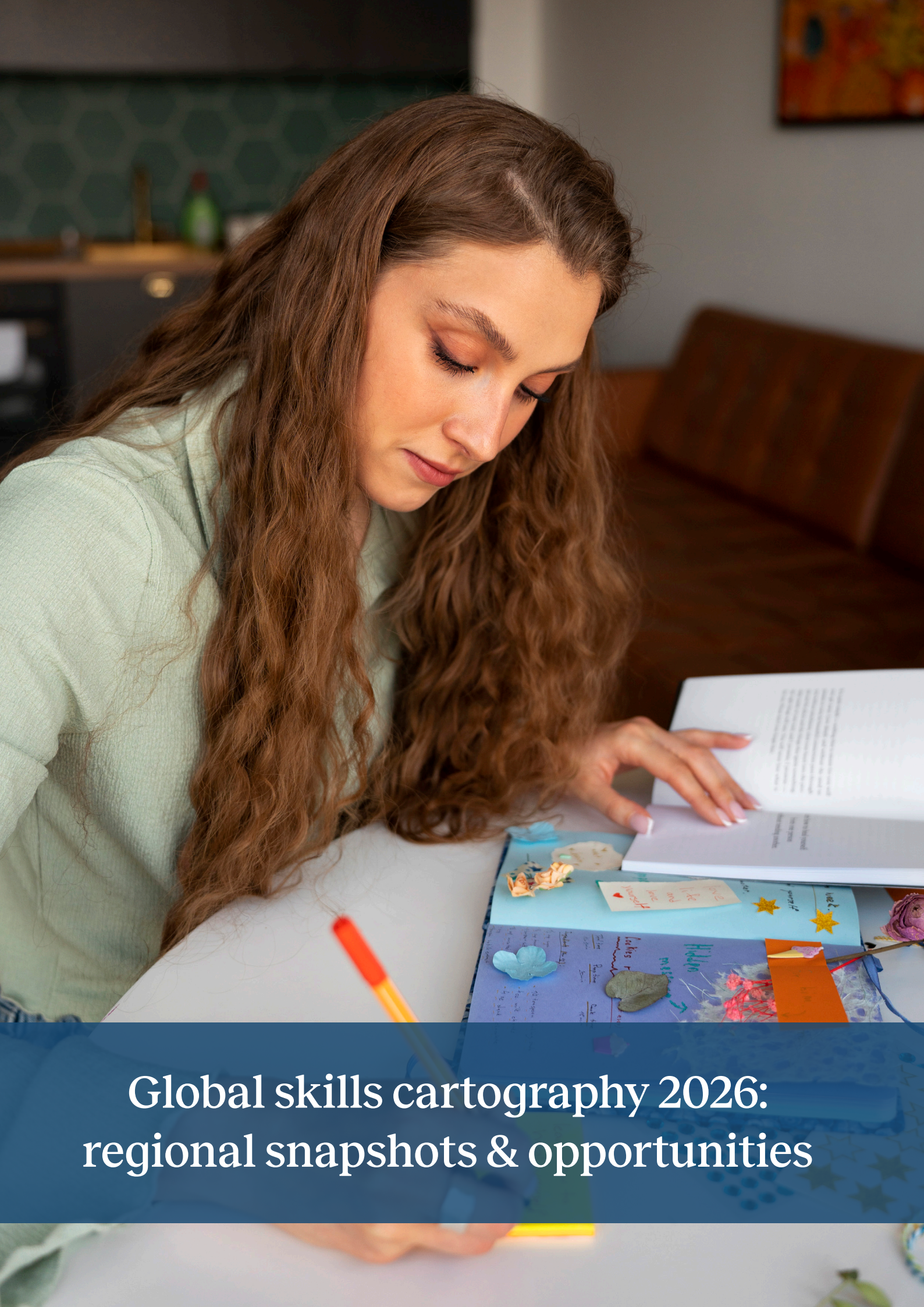
The workforce of 2026 and beyond will be a collaboration between human potential and digital precision, evident in the rapid pace at which AI adoption is advancing. Predictive analytics will make workforces proactive, and shift away from reactive decision-making.

Skill graphs and real-time capability dashboards will help match people to projects across borders.

Deeper insights into workforce dynamics and organizational performance will place people's impact at the center of operating models.

Workforce technology is not just about HR automation but about human enablement led by AI access and responsible policy advocacy. As India's talent ecosystem continues to expand, these platforms will define how people work, how they grow, learn, and lead in the decades ahead.





Global skills cartography 2026: regional snapshots & opportunities

Regional economic leaders
The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)

UNITED ARAB
EMIRATES

THE SULTANATE OF
OMAN

THE KINGDOM OF
SAUDI ARABIA

THE STATE OF
KUWAIT

THE STATE OF
QATAR

Regional Strengths, Strategic Prospects, and Emerging Opportunities

In-demand skills & sectoral growth

The GCC is undergoing a major transformation driven by Saudi Vision 2030, UAE Centennial 2071, and other national strategies. These initiatives are fueling demand for talent in AI, cybersecurity, cloud computing, fintech, sustainability, and healthcare.

Top in-demand skills

- **AI & machine learning:** NLP, MLOps, predictive analytics
- **Cybersecurity:** IoT security, blockchain security, compliance
- **Cloud computing:** Multi-cloud architecture, AWS, Azure, GCP
- **Software development:** React.js, Python, full-stack, mobile
- **Data analytics:** Power BI, Tableau, SQL
- **Fintech & blockchain:** Digital payments, smart contracts
- **Sustainability & ESG:** Renewable energy, climate risk, green building
- **Healthcare IT:** Telemedicine platforms, diagnostics AI

Key growth sectors

- **Technology & smart cities:** NEOM (KSA), Dubai Smart City, e-government
- **Renewable energy:** Solar, wind, hydrogen (Masdar, Red Sea Project)
- **Healthcare:** Telehealth, hospital expansion, medical tourism
- **Tourism & hospitality:** Mega-events, luxury tourism, cultural heritage
- **Construction & infrastructure:** Giga-projects, smart urban planning

Tech salary growth

- **UAE & Saudi Arabia:** Average **8.4% annual growth** in tech salaries
- **Cybersecurity, cloud, blockchain:** Up to **30% salary premiums** for certified experts

Sample salary benchmarks (2025, USD)

ROLE	ANNUAL SALARY(USD)
AI/ML Engineer	$45,000–$120,000
Cybersecurity Specialist	$50,000–$130,000
Cloud Architect	$60,000–$140,000
Software Developer	$40,000–$100,000
Data Scientist	$50,000–$110,000
Renewable Energy Engineer	$55,000–$95,000
Nurse/Healthcare Technician	$30,000–$65,000
Project Manager (Infra)	$60,000–$120,000

Salaries vary by country, experience, and sector. UAE and KSA offer the highest compensation packages.

Hiring trends

- **Remote & hybrid work:** Increasing adoption across tech and finance
- **Healthcare & tourism:** Double-digit growth due to infrastructure and events
- **Project-based hiring:** Common in construction, digital transformation, and energy
- **Localization policies:** Saudization, Emiratization, and Qatarization shaping hiring strategies

Government initiatives & strategic investments

Vision-driven development

- **Saudi vision 2030:** Diversification into tourism, entertainment, tech, and renewables
- **UAE centennial 2071:** Focus on innovation, education, and global leadership in AI and sustainability

FDI & talent strategy

GCC nations are attracting global talent with:

- **Tax-free salaries**
- **Premium expat packages**
- **Digital nomad visas**
- **Smart city infrastructure**

Workplace benefits

Standard benefits:

- End-of-service gratuity
- Health insurance (often family-inclusive)
- Paid leave (21–30 days annually)
- Annual bonuses and relocation support

Expat packages:

- Housing, schooling, travel allowances
- Cultural integration and language support

Lifestyle & living

- **UAE & Qatar:** High quality of life, world-class healthcare, international schools
- **Saudi Arabia:** Rapid modernization, growing expat-friendly zones (e.g., NEOM)
- **Oman & Kuwait:** More traditional, relaxed pace, affordable living

Work culture

- Multicultural teams, emphasis on **soft skills, strategic thinking,** and **adaptability**
- Increasing focus on **ESG-linked compensation and equity participation** for senior roles

United Arab Emirates

2025 workforce, skills & opportunity landscape

Economic & sectoral growth

GDP growth: The UAE's GDP is projected to grow 4.8% in 2025, with non-oil sector growth at 3.5%, driven by manufacturing, finance, tourism, and logistics.

Manufacturing: Now contributes 15% of GDP, supported by Operation 300bn, aiming to double industrial output by 2031.

Diversification: Over 77% of GDP now comes from non-oil sectors, with strong momentum in digital transformation, infrastructure, and green energy.

Top job-creating sectors

- Technology & AI
- Finance & banking
- Hospitality & tourism
- Healthcare & medtech
- Renewable energy
- Logistics & supply chain

Hiring market outlook

- UAE holds the **world's highest net employment outlook** in 2025 at **48%**, ahead of India, the US, and China.
- **20% YoY increase** in tech sector vacancies, with strong demand for AI, cloud, and cybersecurity roles.

Emerging job roles, salaries & hiring trends

In-demand roles

- AI/Data analysts, cloud architects, cybersecurity experts
- Software engineers (python, react), medical professionals
- Compliance officers, banking analysts, hospitality managers

Average annual salaries (2025, USD)

ROLE	SALARY RANGE (USD)
AI/Data Analyst	$58,800–$114,400
Software Developer	$52,300–$81,500
Cybersecurity Specialist	$61,000–$114,400
Registered Nurse	$65,125–$105,810
Banking/Finance Professional	$90,000–$163,500

Salaries vary by emirate and employer. Dubai and Abu Dhabi offer the highest compensation.

Hiring trends

- Rise in **project-based roles, international recruitment,** and **digital transformation hiring.**
- Companies offer **bonuses, housing, relocation,** and **golden visas** to attract top talent.
- High job mobility: 34–49% of professionals in Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Riyadh rate job availability as "good" or better.

Government initiatives & investment climate

Strategic programs

- **Vision 2031:** Targets doubling GDP to AED 3 trillion, boosting non-oil exports, and ranking in the global top 10 for healthcare, education, and innovation.
- **Operation 300bn:** Aims to grow industrial output to AED 300 billion by 2031, creating 25,000 specialized jobs.
- **Centennial 2071:** Long-term plan to make UAE the best country globally by 2071, focusing on education, innovation, and a diversified knowledge economy.

FDI & talent attraction

- **FDI inflows** reached **$45.6 billion USD** in 2024 (+48.5% YoY), with 100% foreign ownership allowed in most sectors.
- Key investment areas: **tech, logistics, finance, real estate, renewable energy**
- **Golden Visas, digital licensing, and university–industry partnerships** support talent retention and innovation.

Employment quality, benefits & lifestyle

Salary & benefits

No personal income tax:

- Standard packages include:
- Housing & transport allowances
- Health insurance
- Annual flights
- End-of-service gratuity

Statutory entitlements:

- 30 days paid annual leave
- 90 days sick leave (tiered pay)
- Maternity: 60 days (45 full, 15 half); Paternity: 5 days
- Mandatory health insurance in Abu Dhabi & Dubai

Quality of life

- Ranked **#7 globally** for expat living
- High scores in **infrastructure, safety, healthcare,** and **education**
- **82% of expats** report satisfaction with healthcare access
- Strong **work-life balance,** multicultural environment, and modern amenities

Job satisfaction & security

- UAE is consistently ranked among the **most reliable countries for global professionals**
- High satisfaction in **tech, healthcare, and finance**
- Career mobility supported by **free zones, remote work,** and **international networks**

The Sultanate of Oman

2025 workforce, skills & opportunity landscape

Economic & sectoral growth

- GDP Growth: Oman's GDP is projected to grow between 2.8% and 3.1% in 2025, with stronger momentum expected in 2026 due to easing oil cuts, fiscal reforms, and diversification.

Non-oil sector expansion:

- **Logistics & manufacturing:** Industrial profits surged by **476%,** with major investments in SOHAR Port & Freezone and Dhofar industrial zones.
- **Fintech & green energy:** Hydrogen, solar, and circular economy ventures are attracting FDI.
- **Tourism:** Over 11 new coastal resorts launched between 2024–2026; tourism is central to Vision 2040.
- **Healthcare & education:** New private hospitals and international schools are driving demand for foreign talent.

Emerging job roles, salaries & hiring trends

Hiring trends

- 1.6M expats work in the private sector; demand is highest in healthcare, IT, energy, and construction.
- Digital, green, and logistics skills are rapidly rising.
- Smart city, fintech, and infrastructure megaprojects are driving project-based hiring.

High-demand roles & monthly salaries

ROLE	USD/MONTH
Specialist Doctor (ICU/Cardio)	$3,900–$9,100
Registered Nurse	$1,300–$3,100
Software Developer	$2,350–$4,700
Cybersecurity Analyst	$3,100–$5,200
EPC Project Manager	$3,640–$5,720
Maintenance Engineer	$2,600–$4,700
Hotel Operations Manager	$2,000–$3,640
Secondary STEM Teacher	$1,560–$2,860
Finance (FP&A, Accountant)	$2,340–$3,900

Salaries vary by location and employer. Muscat offers the highest compensation.

Government initiatives & investment climate

Vision 2040

- Goal: Raise **non-oil GDP share to 90%+** by 2040.
- Focus: **Omanization,** diversification, and sustainable development.

FDI & incentives

FDI stock: Reached **$78.8B USD** in 2025, with strong inflows into **logistics, renewables, manufacturing, and healthcare.**

Free zones: Sohar, Duqm, Salalah offer:

- 100% foreign ownership
- Tax holidays up to 25–30 years
- Zero customs duties
- Relaxed Omanization quotas (20%)

Labor law & investor residency

- From 2026, all foreign investors must employ **at least one Omani.**
- **Golden Visas** and **long-term land leases** available for strategic investors.

Employment quality, benefits & lifestyle

Expat benefits

- **Tax-free salaries**
- **Housing allowance or provided housing**
- **Health insurance (family-inclusive)**
- **Annual flights & relocation support**
- **Education support:** Tuition for children in **IB/British curriculum schools**

Lifestyle & living

- Ranked **#11 globally** for expat living
- Blend of **luxury, culture, and nature:** beaches, mountains, golf, malls
- High **expat retention** due to safety, affordability, and career growth

Workplace culture

- Emphasis on **mentoring Omanis, cultural inclusion,** and **English fluency**
- Non-oil employers value **digital and green skills**
- Strong focus on **leadership development** and **local capacity building**

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

2025 workforce, skills & opportunity landscape

Economic & sectoral growth

GDP Growth: Projected between **3.2% and 4.0%** in 2025, driven by a rebound in oil output and strong non-oil sector expansion.

Non-Oil Private Sector: Grew **5% YoY,** now contributing nearly **77% of GDP,** supported by mega-projects like **NEOM, The Red Sea Project,** and rising demand in services and industry.

Unemployment: Dropped to 2.8% in Q1 2025, with **female labor participation** up **+3.1 percentage points YoY.**

Key growth sectors

- Technology & AI
- Renewable energy
- Construction & infrastructure
- Healthcare & medtech
- Tourism & hospitality
- Education & financial services

Emerging job roles, salaries & hiring trends

Hiring trends

- **1M+ new jobs** expected by 2030 from Vision 2030 projects.
- High demand in **tech, sustainability, education, and healthcare.**
- Skills in **AI, data analytics, project management, and English fluency** are prioritized.
- Expats fill critical gaps in **engineering, healthcare, and digital transformation.**

Top In-demand roles & monthly salaries

ROLE	USD/MONTH
Digital Marketing Specialist	$2,530–$9,330
Data Analyst/ Scientist	$2,130–$6,660
Software Developer/ Engineer	$2,000–$5,860
Civil Engineer	$2,130–$7,980
Nurse	$1,460–$3,990
Cybersecurity Expert	$3,200–$8,500
Renewable Energy Engineer	$2,660–$7,460
Teacher/Education Specialist	$1,600–$5,330
Accountant/Finance Analyst	$1,860–$4,800

Salaries vary by city and experience. Riyadh and NEOM offer the highest compensation.

Government initiatives & investment climate

Vision 2040

- Focus on **Saudization,** economic diversification, and women's workforce inclusion.
- Giga-projects like **NEOM ($500B)** and **Qiddiya** are transforming the job landscape.
- **FDI Inflows:** SAR 22.2B (**~$5.92B USD**) in Q1 2025, up **44% YoY.**

Labor law & investor residency

2025 labor law amendments:

- Mandatory housing and transport allowances
- Extended probation (180 days)
- Enhanced maternity and bereavement leave
- Written contracts required for all foreign workers

Private sector hiring

- Employers offer **golden visas, long-term contracts,** and **global best practices.**
- New rules link **local job creation** to FDI incentives.

Employment quality, benefits & lifestyle

Expat & local benefits

- **Tax-free salaries**
- **Housing, transport, and education allowances**
- **Private healthcare,** annual flights, and **end-of-service bonuses**
- **GOSI** (social insurance) for nationals; **private pension plans** for expats

Lifestyle & work environment

- Ranked among the **top 10 globally** for expat living
- High quality of life in **Riyadh, Jeddah, and NEOM**
- World-class infrastructure, international schools, and hospitals
- Cultural adaptability required; strict laws but low personal security risks

Job satisfaction

- High satisfaction in **tech, healthcare, and finance**
- **Work-life balance** initiatives improving retention
- Expats valued for **mentorship and knowledge transfer** roles

The State of Kuwait

2025 workforce, skills & opportunity landscape

Economic & sectoral growth

GDP growth: Kuwait's GDP is projected to grow 2.6%–2.9% in 2025, recovering from a contraction in 2024. Oil sector growth is forecast at 2.4%, while non-oil sectors are expected to grow 2.7%.

Oil & gas: Still the backbone of the economy (67% of GDP), but diversification is accelerating.

Non-oil sectors:

- **Manufacturing:** Grew **4.3% YoY** in Q1 2025.
- **Real estate & transport:** Moderate growth, supported by infrastructure projects.
- **Financial services & digital infrastructure:** Expanding due to Vision 2040 reforms.
- **Healthcare & education:** New hospitals and international schools are driving demand for foreign professionals.

Emerging job roles, salaries & hiring trends

Hiring trends

- **Flexible, project-based hiring** is rising in tech, healthcare, and construction.
- **Expat-heavy workforce:** Over 70% of **Kuwait's population** are expatriates.
- **Skills in demand:** Data analytics, cloud computing, cybersecurity, project management, and bilingual fluency (English/Arabic).

High-demand roles & monthly salaries

ROLE	USD/MONTH
Petroleum Engineer	$6,500–$11,400
IT Analyst/ Cloud/ Cybersecurity	$4,900–$14,500
Financial Analyst/ Compliance	$4,900–$9,800
Medical Specialist (Surgeon)	$8,200–$14,500
University Lecturer	$3,900–$9,200
Civil / Project Engineer	$3,270–$8,200

Salaries vary by employer, experience, and sector.

Government initiatives & investment climate

Vision 2040

- Focuses on **economic diversification, digital transformation,** and **green energy.**
- Aims to reduce oil dependency and boost competitiveness in **ICT, finance, education, and renewables.**

FDI & incentives

- Targeting **$200B USD in FDI by 2035.**
- Incentives include:
  - **Tax holidays (up to 10 years)**
  - **Customs duty relief**
  - **Land grants**
  - **Residency visas for investors**
- Reforms allow **100% foreign ownership** and **direct participation in government tenders.**

Public-private partnerships

- Active in **smart cities, transport, healthcare,** and **education.**
- PPPs are central to job creation and infrastructure development.

Employment quality, benefits & lifestyle

Benefits & work culture

Tax-free salaries

Standard expat packages include:

- **Housing & transport allowances**
- **Private health insurance**
- **Annual flights**
- **End-of-service gratuity**
- **Tuition assistance for children**

Expat lifestyle

- **High per-capita income,** strong public safety, and modern infrastructure.
- **Multicultural workplaces** with English widely spoken.
- Popular expat areas: **Salmiya, Mahboula, Hawalli, Mangaf**
- **International schools** offer British, American, Indian, and French curricula.

Living costs

- **Rent:** $810–$2,275 USD per month
- **Utilities & internet:** $98–$195 USD per mont
- **Groceries:** $490–$975 USD per month (for a family)
- **Entertainment:** KWD 50–150/month

Job satisfaction & opportunities

- High satisfaction among **technical and leadership roles**
- Employers emphasize **well-being, career growth,** and **global mobility**
- **Kuwaitization** applies mainly to public sector; private sector remains open to skilled expats

The State of Qatar

2025 Workforce, skills & opportunity landscape

Economic & sectoral growth

GDP growth: Qatar's GDP is projected to grow **2.8% in 2025,** with acceleration to **5.3% in 2026** driven by the **North Field LNG expansion,** which will boost LNG capacity by 50% by 2027.

Non-hydrocarbon sector: Grew **3.4% YoY** in Q2 2025, now contributing **65.6% of GDP**, led by services, tourism, real estate, and logistics.

Key growth sectors:

- **Energy:** LNG, hydrogen, renewables
- **Infrastructure:** Post-World Cup mega-projects
- **Finance & services:** Trade, accommodation, retail (services GDP up 8.8%)
- **Healthcare & education:** Private hospitals, schools, and R&D initiatives

Emerging job roles, salaries & hiring trends

Hiring trends

- **Skills in demand:** STEM, project management, cloud, cybersecurity, healthcare, hospitality
- **Entry-level demand:** Customer service, call centers, retail
- **Global recruitment:** Expats from India, Philippines, and Southeast Asia dominate skilled roles
- **Minimum wage:** Set at **QAR 1,800/month,** includes food and housing; wage protection laws enforced

In-demand roles & monthly salaries

ROLE	USD/MONTH
Petroleum/Process Engineer	$6,900–$16,500
Civil/Project Engineer	$3,300–$7,700
IT/Cybersecurity Specialist	$2,700–$5,000
Healthcare Professional	$2,400–$8,800
Finance Analyst/Auditor	$3,300–$6,900
Sales/Business Development	$1,400–$4,700
Hospitality/Tourism	$1,150–$2,900

Salaries vary by employer, experience, and sector.

Government initiatives & investment climate

Qatar national vision 2030

- Focus on **economic diversification, knowledge economy,** and **human development**

- Third national development strategy (2024–2030) targets:
  - Private sector growth
  - Infrastructure modernization
  - Education and healthcare reform

FDI & business reforms

- **FDI inflows:** $2.74B in 2024–2025, with **95% in greenfield projects**
- **Target sectors:** Renewables, fintech, education, logistics
- **Reforms:**
  - 100% foreign ownership in key sectors
  - Startup visas and accelerator zones
  - Sovereign funds backing clean energy and tech

Workforce policy

- **Qatarization:** Prioritizes nationals in public sector; private sector remains open to skilled expats
- **Labor law updates:**
  - No NOC required for job changes
  - Wage Protection System (WPS) ensures timely payments
  - End-of-service benefits and paid leave mandated

Employment quality, benefits & lifestyle

Benefits & work culture

Tax-free salaries

Standard expat packages include:

- **Housing & transport allowances**
- **Medical insurance**
- **Annual flights**
- **End-of-service gratuity**

Workweek: Sunday–Thursday; reduced hours during Ramadan

Expat lifestyle

- Ranked **Top 5 globally** for family lifestyle and safety
- **Multicultural workforce:** 85% expat population
- **International schools,** world-class healthcare, and strong remittance potential
- **Community living:** Indian and Filipino diasporas prominent
- **Mobility & career growth:** Clear progression paths, upskilling support, and family sponsorship options

Regional economic leaders South East Asia

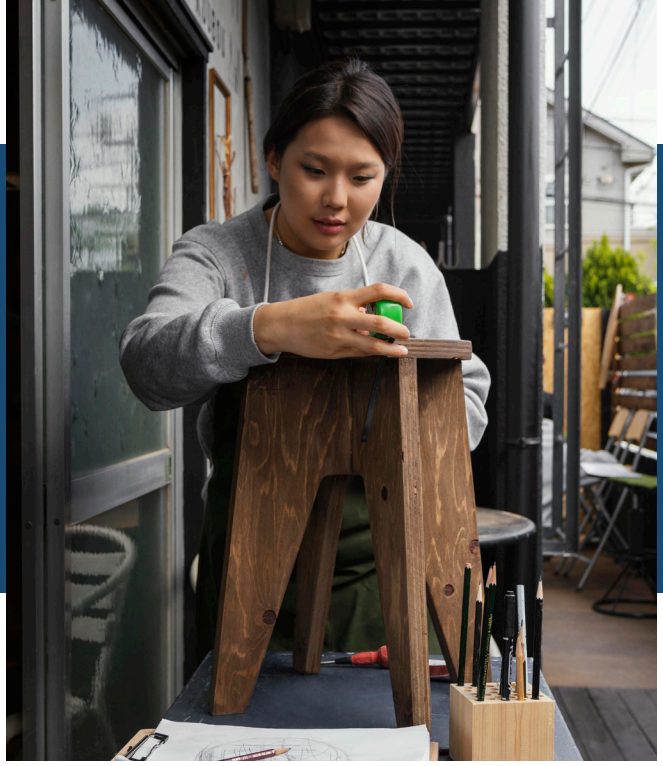
THE REPUBLIC OF THE
PHILIPPINES

MALAYSIA

THE REPUBLIC OF
INDONESIA

Regional Strengths, Strategic Prospects, and Emerging Opportunities

In-demand skills & sectoral shifts



Southeast Asia is undergoing rapid digital transformation, with **AI, cybersecurity, cloud computing, fintech, and e-commerce** emerging as dominant sectors. The region is also investing heavily in **advanced manufacturing, supply chain resilience, and digital infrastructure.**

Top in-demand skills:

- **Advanced data analytics:** Power BI, Tableau, SQL
- **Software engineering:** React.js, Node.js, Python
- **Cybersecurity:** GRC, threat intelligence, cloud security
- **Prompt engineering & AI/ML:** Generative AI, NLP, model tuning
- **Digital marketing & UX:** SEO/SEM, content strategy, product design
- **Fintech & blockchain:** Payments, DeFi, smart contracts
- **Cloud platforms:** AWS, Azure, Google Cloud

Sectoral Drivers:

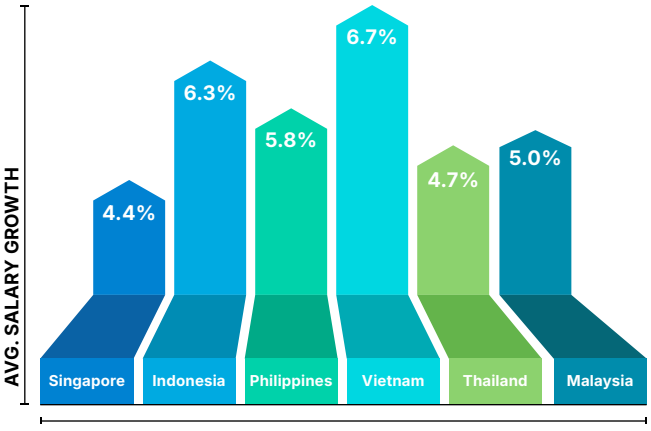
- **Philippines:** BPO evolution, fintech, healthcare, AI-powered recruitment
- **Malaysia:** Semiconductor, cloud infrastructure, e-commerce, digital services
- **Indonesia:** Manufacturing, renewable energy, logistics, startup tech

Salary growth & hiring trends

Hiring trends:

- **Remote work:** 24% of new jobs are hybrid or fully remote; demand for remote tech teams has surged by 200% in Malaysia
- **Cross-border hiring:** Employers increasingly hire across ASEAN borders, especially in tech and healthcare
- **AI in recruitment:** Platforms like Kalibrr (Philippines) and Job3s.vn (Vietnam) use AI for candidate matching and assessments

Projected salary increases (2025):

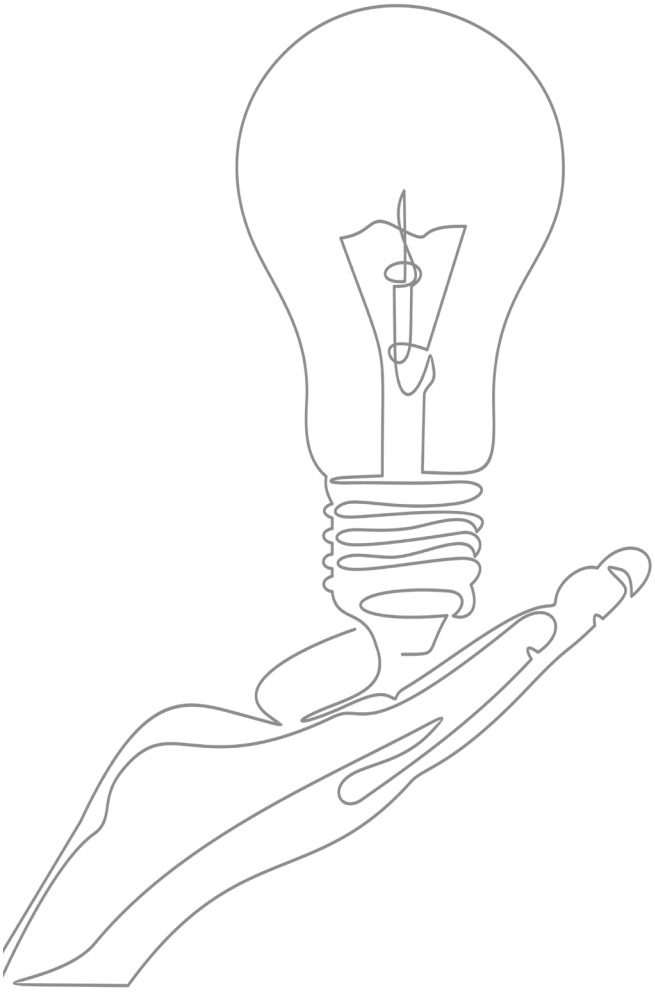


Freelance & specialist day rates:

- **Project managers (Malaysia):** $225–$835/day
- **Strategy consultants (Indonesia):** $425–$1,250/day
- **Data analysts (Singapore):** $350–$925/day
- **Digital marketers (Indonesia):** $225–$625/day

Workforce transformation & talent strategy

- **Digital economy value:** Southeast Asia's digital economy surpassed $363 billion in 2025
- **Skills shortages:** 77% of employers report difficulty filling key roles, especially in IT, engineering, and healthcare
- **Upskilling focus:** Governments and companies are investing in AI, cloud, and cybersecurity training to bridge talent gaps
- **Startup ecosystem:** Indonesia and Vietnam are attracting remote workers and digital nomads with affordable living and vibrant tech scenes.



The Republic of the Philippines

2025 workforce, skills & opportunity landscape

Economic & sectoral growth

- **GDP growth:** Projected at **5.3%–5.6%** in 2025, driven by **private consumption, digital transformation, and infrastructure investment.**
- **Job creation:** Reforms could add **5.1 million jobs by 2040,** with a 1.4 percentage point boost to long-term GDP growth.

Key growth sectors

- **Technology & digital economy:** Contributes **5% of GDP** (~$35B USD), growing at **14%+ annually**. Fastest-growing roles include **cloud engineers, AI specialists,** and **software developers.**
- **Manufacturing & BPO:** Valued at **$127.8B USD,** with strong performance in **electronics, food processing,** and **logistics.**
- **Healthcare & medtech:** Expanding due to **infrastructure upgrades** and **post-pandemic reforms.**
- **Renewable energy & tourism:** Tourism employs **16M people,** projected to reach **18.5M by 2035.** Renewables are gaining traction under national energy plans.

Emerging roles, salaries & hiring trends

High-demand roles

- **Tech:** Software engineers (Java, Python), cloud architects, cybersecurity experts, AI/ML engineers
- **Data & systems:** Data scientists, systems integration specialists
- **Healthcare:** Nurses, MedTech professionals
- **Business & support:** Financial analysts, product managers, customer support, digital marketers

Average annual salaries

ROLE	SALARY RANGE (USD)
Software Developer/ Engineer	$8,500–$13,500
Data Scientist	$6,800–$10,200
Cloud Solutions Architect	UP TO $42,500
Nurse	$5,000–$7,600
Financial Analyst	~$6,100
Product Manager	~$10,100
Entry-Level Support/VA	$3,000–$5,100

Salaries vary by region and experience. Metro Manila offers 30–40% higher wages than provincial areas.

Hiring trends

- **24.4% of companies** plan to expand hiring, especially in **ICT, healthcare,** and **finance.**

- Strongest placement rates in **BPO, e-commerce, MedTech,** and **logistics.**
- Remote and hybrid work models are increasingly common in tech and creative sectors.

Government initiatives & investment climate

CREATE MORE Act (2024)

Expanded fiscal incentives for foreign investors:

- **Corporate tax reduced to 20%**
- Up to **27 years of tax exemptions**
- Enhanced deductions for energy, training, and R&D
- Streamlined VAT and local tax policies

Foreign direct investment (FDI)

- **$8.9B USD** in FDI inflows (2024), with continued growth in **manufacturing, ICT,** and **renewables.**
- Investment facilitation via **PEZA** and **BOI,** with "green lanes" for strategic projects.

Job creation via policy

- Over **38,000 new jobs** created in Q2 2025 from approved investments, mostly in **energy, ICT,** and **manufacturing.**

Private sector upskilling

- Programs by **Microsoft, Google,** and the **Philippine Digital Workforce Competitiveness Act** support digital skills development.

Employment quality, benefits & lifestyle

Employee benefits

Mandatory:

- 13th-month pay
- PhilHealth (universal healthcare)
- SSS (retirement, disability, maternity)
- Pag-IBIG (housing fund)
- Paid leave (maternity, paternity, solo parent, gynecological surgery)

Additional:

- Overtime pay, night shift differential, holiday pay

Work-life & remote flexibility

- Remote work is common in **tech, BPO,** and **creative industries.**
- Employers offer **flexible hours, HMO coverage,** and **skills development allowances.**

Expat lifestyle

- **English proficiency** is high; Manila and Cebu are top hubs for digital nomads.
- **Low cost of living,** vibrant culture, and strong community networks.
- **Healthcare:** Public system available; private insurance recommended for expats.
- **Taxation:** Expats taxed only on **Philippine-sourced income,** favorable for remote/gig workers.

Malaysia

2025 workforce, skills & opportunity landscape

Economic & sectoral growth

- **GDP growth:** Malaysia's economy is projected to grow between **4.7% and 5.2%** in 2025, driven by strong performance in **services, manufacturing,** and a rebound in **mining and construction.**

Key growth drivers

- Services Sector: Contributes **53%+ of GDP,** led by **tech, fintech, logistics,** and **shared services.**
- **Manufacturing & electronics:** Includes **semiconductors, automotive, E&E,** and **green technologies.**
- **Digital economy:** Accounts for **22.6% of GDP,** with a target of **25.5% by end of 2025.**
- **Tourism:** Rebounding with **19.1M** arrivals as of September 2025, boosting hospitality and retail.

Emerging job roles, salaries & hiring trends

Hiring trends

- **Unemployment:** Low at **3.2%,** with a **70.7% labor participation rate.**
- **Digital & remote roles:** Growing in **tech, project management, creative fields.**
- **Top-paying sectors: Tech, oil & gas, banking, healthcare.**
- **59% of employers** plan to increase headcount in 2025, especially in **AI, data science, and digital infrastructure.**

High-demand roles & average annual salaries

ROLE	SALARY RANGE (USD)
AI/ML Engineer	$20,000–$51,000
Cybersecurity Specialist	$20,500–$46,200
Software/Web Developer	$15,400–$45,000
UI/UX Designer	$16,700–$30,900
Renewable Energy Engineer	$26,300–$49,000
Nurse/Healthcare Professional	$12,900–$28,500

Salaries vary by location, experience, and employer. Kuala Lumpur and Penang offer the highest compensation.

Government initiatives & investment climate

FDI & investment incentives

- **Approved investments (H1 2025):** RM190.3B **(~$40B USD),** creating **89,000+ jobs.**

Key incentives:

- Tax breaks for **tech, green energy, advanced manufacturing**
- **Carbon credits** and **R&D grants**
- Special Economic Zones (e.g., **Johor-Singapore SEZ**)

Budget 2025 highlights

Investment incentive framework (IIF2025):

- RM1B strategic fund for **AI, robotics, IoT, FinTech**
- Support for **local supply chains** and **upskilling**
- Integration with **NIMP 2030, madani economy,** and **digital economy blueprint**

Employment quality, benefits & lifestyle

Employee benefits

Mandatory:

- EPF (retirement), SOCSO (insurance), 13th-month pay
- Paid leave, maternity/paternity benefits

Common perks:

- Private medical insurance (often family-inclusive)
- Housing, car, relocation, and annual travel allowances for expats
- Flexible work arrangements and hybrid models

Cost of living & expat lifestyle

Minimum wage: RM1,700/month **(~$363 USD)**

Living costs:

- Kuala Lumpur: ~$1,500/month
- Penang: ~$1,050/month

Healthcare: High-quality public and private systems; private insurance recommended for expats

Digital nomad visa: DE Rantau Pass supports remote workers with multiple-entry privileges and coworking access

Workplace satisfaction

Top motivators:

- Fair compensation
- Work-life balance
- Career development

Retention risks:

- 40% of employees aged 30–34 are likely to switch jobs within 12 months
- Rising healthcare costs and perceived benefit gaps are key concerns.

The Republic of Indonesia

2025 workforce, skills & opportunity landscape

Economic & sectoral growth

- **GDP growth:** Indonesia's economy is projected to grow between **4.8% and 5.2%** in 2025, supported by strong exports, infrastructure investment, and consumer spending.
- **Job creation**: Over **1.26 million new jobs** were created in H1 2025, with Q2 alone adding **665,000 jobs,** triple the number from five years ago.

Key growth sectors

- **Manufacturing & infrastructure:** Grew **9.3% YoY,** driven by FDI in industrial zones, construction, and logistics.
- **Digital economy & data centers:** Cloud, AI, fintech, and cybersecurity are expanding rapidly.
- **Healthcare & hospitals:** Private capital is fueling hospital construction and MedTech innovation.
- **Energy & renewables:** Mining, solar, and green infrastructure are top FDI targets.

Emerging roles, salaries & hiring trends

High-demand roles

- **Tech:** Software engineers (Java, Python, React), cloud architects, cybersecurity experts
- **Data & AI:** Data scientists, ML engineers, analytics leads
- **Business & finance:** Risk managers, finance directors, compliance officers
- **Engineering:** Civil, electrical, renewable energy, mining
- **Healthcare:** Nurses, hospital administrators

Average monthly salaries

ROLE	MONTHLY SALARY(USD)
Software Engineer	$950–$1,850
Data Scientist	$750–$1,560
Finance Director	$9,400–$14,100
Mining Chief	$4,600–$6,250
Nurse	$440–$940
Marketing Director	$7,500–$8,100
Entry-Level Roles	$310–$625

Salaries vary by region and experience. Jakarta and Bali offer higher compensation.

Hiring trends

- **Salary growth:** 5–8% annually in tech, finance, and AI roles.

- **Retention strategies:** Bonuses, counter-offers, and flexible contracts are common.
- **Skills-based hiring:** Employers prioritize practical expertise over formal degrees.
- **Remote work:** Hybrid models are growing in Jakarta, Surabaya, and Bali.

Government initiatives & investment climate

FDI & investment growth

- **Q2 2025 FDI:** IDR 450 trillion (**~$27B USD**), up 2.8% YoY.
- **Total investment (YTD):** IDR 1,434 trillion (**~$92B USD**), creating **1.95 million jobs.**
- **Priority sectors:** Renewable energy, digital tech, E&E manufacturing, logistics, mining

Policy & stimulus

Golden Indonesia 2045 Vision:

- 17 national programs focused on education, healthcare, infrastructure, and digital transformation
- Target: High-income status by 2045

Economic package: IDR 30 trillion (**~$1.81B USD**) for cash transfers and paid internships for 35M households

Positive investment list: Liberalized FDI in tech, green energy, tourism, and logistics

Employment quality, benefits & lifestyle

Employee benefits

Mandatory:

- BPJS (social security), health insurance, paid leave (12–15 days), overtime pay, annual bonuses

Expat packages:

- Private health insurance, housing allowance, relocation support, cultural integration, language training

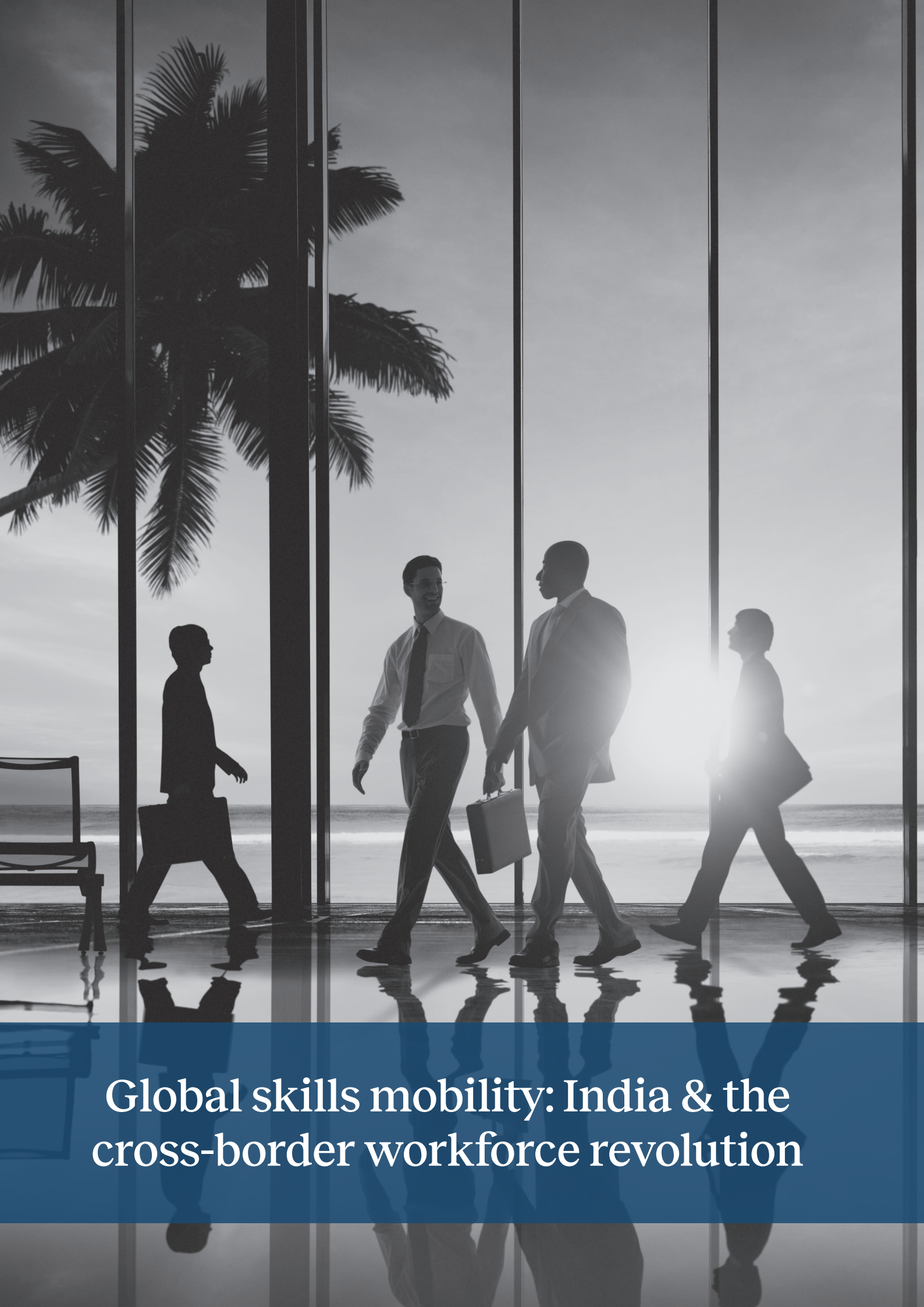
Workplace & lifestyle

Digital hubs: Jakarta, Surabaya, and Bali offer coworking spaces and hybrid work setups

Expat experience:

- Affordable cost of living
- International schools and healthcare in major cities
- Rich culture and nature access

Challenges: Bureaucracy, traffic congestion, and localization policies in hiring



Global skills mobility: India & the cross-border workforce revolution

The skills rebalance: India on the move

By 2030, global labor shortages are projected to reach 85 million, while India is forecast to supply a surplus of 45 million skilled professionals, positioning it as the world's primary talent hub. Bilateral mobility frameworks, mutual recognition of qualifications, and new digital systems for credential tracking are redefining how nations exchange skilled talent.

Across Australia, the GCC, Southeast Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa, governments are refining visa frameworks, expanding recognition agreements, and designing cross-border skill corridors to address shared goals: fill critical digital and green economy roles, boost innovation capacity, and create sustainable employment. India's partnerships with the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Singapore illustrate this shift, anchored in mutual credential recognition, transnational education, and digital-first skill validation mechanisms.

Policy, partnership & the architecture of mobility

Recent policy moves reflect a coordinated vision for talent fluidity and shared prosperity:

- GCC Nations are accelerating workforce diversification under Saudi Vision 2030 and UAE Centennial 2071, emphasizing technology, construction, and healthcare. Indian talent remains integral—fueling both on-site operations and offshore delivery centers.
- Australia and India's Migration and Mobility Partnership Arrangement (MMPA) is deepening student, researcher, and skilled professional exchanges, particularly in engineering, healthcare, and green energy sectors.
- Southeast Asian economies, led by Singapore and Malaysia, have integrated India into regional upskilling ecosystems via AI and fintech collaboration agreements.
- African partnerships, especially in Kenya and South Africa, are expanding through digital skilling programs and India-led startup incubation under the Pan-African e-Network initiative.

Together, these efforts strengthen the foundations of a more mobile, interoperable, and AI-augmented workforce with one where skills travel as freely as ideas.

Digital acceleration & the rise of platform work

India's transformation from "back office" to "brain trust" has been catalyzed by digital infrastructure and gig platforms enabling seamless global work. With 9 million freelancers projected by 2025 and over 31 crore registered flexible workers, India has emerged as both a supplier of talent and a platform nation in its own right.

Gig market places such as Upwork, Toptal, and Freelancer.com have seen surges in participation across IT, design, finance, and data services. The government's Skill India Mission now integrates export-oriented curricula, ensuring that trained workers meet global standards across GCC, Australia, and ASEAN markets.

Moreover, AI-supplemented work has amplified individual capacity. In 2025, over 40% of India's IT and gig workforce uses AI tools for automation, analytics, and creative production. With 71% of Gen Z freelancers receiving AI training, India is pioneering a new hybrid model of human-AI collaboration, balancing technical precision with creative problem-solving.

Economic & social impact: the India–world feedback loop

Remittances from Indian professionals abroad exceeded $100 billion in 2025, underscoring how human capital exports directly strengthen national economic resilience. Global Capability Centres (GCCs) continue to expand, employing 2 million professionals and contributing $46 billion in exports annually.

The ripple effects are visible across regions:

- Tier-2 and Tier-3 Indian cities like Coimbatore, Indore, and Kochi are becoming new delivery hubs for global operations.
- Indian companies are investing outward with establishing local subsidiaries in Australia, the UAE, and South Africa focused on renewables, healthcare, and edtech.
- FDI flows between India and the GCC have doubled since 2022, fueled by joint innovation labs in AI, clean tech, and manufacturing.

This bilateral exchange of talent, investment, and innovation underscores a new economic geography, where workforce and knowledge ecosystems evolve together.

Technology & AI as the great enablers

Cloud computing, generative AI, blockchain credentials, and immersive collaboration tools are redefining how and where people work. India's leadership in AI infrastructure, supported by policies like the India AI Mission and collaborations with Google and Microsoft, is making remote global employment frictionless.

AI-driven learning models such as adaptive reskilling platforms and blockchain-verified credentials are bridging skill gaps across borders. For freelancers and entrepreneurs, these systems provide a transparent, trusted record of skills, valid anywhere. Across sectors, AI is not displacing workers but redefining their potential by automating tasks, expanding reach, and multiplying innovation output.

The future map: collaborative, distributed & AI-empowered

India's trajectory, bolstered by its youthful demography, digital infrastructure, and entrepreneurial ecosystem, demonstrates how economies can grow by exporting knowledge, not just labor.

Across regions, the shared challenge now is ensuring inclusivity, ethical AI use, and equitable access to digital tools. The coming decade will reward nations and organizations that build bridges, between education and employability, between AI and human intuition, and between local expertise and global demand.

India's story in this cartography is one of convergence: of policy and innovation, of skills and mobility, of human ambition and digital possibility.

Talent demand across Asia & the Middle East

A new talent geography: India's expanding influence in Asia & the Middle East

Across Asia and the Middle East, the contours of talent demand are being rewritten by technology, trade realignments, and demographic opportunity. India stands at the nexus of this transformation, serving simultaneously as a **supplier, partner, and platform nation** in the evolving global skills ecosystem. The post-pandemic acceleration of digital transformation, green energy investments, and AI-driven innovation has triggered an unprecedented demand for **specialized, mobile, and flexible talent.**

In 2025, the **Middle East and Asia-Pacific** regions together represent the fastest-growing zones for high-skilled employment, particularly across artificial intelligence, cloud computing, cybersecurity, fintech, advanced manufacturing, and health sciences. According to Outsized's Talent-on-Demand Report (2025), day rates for independent consultants in MENA range between **USD 300 and USD 1,000,** underscoring the premium placed on expertise in change management, data analytics, and digital transformation.

For India, these trends are not abstract statistics, they represent **pathways of opportunity.** The nation's long-standing educational and economic ties with the **Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)** countries, dating back to the 1970s oil economy, have evolved into strategic partnerships that now extend into high-skill domains. From engineers and healthcare professionals in the UAE and Saudi Arabia to data scientists and AI specialists supporting GCC innovation programs, India's talent pipeline is driving the **next generation of digital economies.**

At the same time, Southeast Asian nations such as Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia are reshaping their labor markets through public-private partnerships that prioritize **AI and automation as catalysts for inclusion and innovation.** India's collaboration with ASEAN countries under initiatives like the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) and Skill India International aligns with these ambitions, creating a regional framework for mutual recognition of skills and certifications.

As the **gig economy and remote work ecosystems** continue to expand, talent mobility is becoming less about geography and more about accessibility. The growing interdependence among Asia and Middle Eastern economies reflects a shared recognition: that the future of work will depend on the seamless integration of **human capability and technological infrastructure**

Anchoring demand in industry transformation

The surge in demand for skilled talent across these regions is inseparable from the **industrial modernization** sweeping through both Asia and the Middle East. By 2025, combined **IT spending in these regions surpassed USD 100 billion,** with investments in AI, cloud computing, and cybersecurity growing by over 15% year-on-year (Gartner Regional ICT Forecast, 2025).

In the **Gulf,** sovereign vision programs such as Saudi Vision 2030, UAE Centennial 2071, and Qatar National Vision 2030 have positioned knowledge, digital infrastructure, and sustainability as central pillars of development. The GCC collectively approved over **USD 37 billion in FDI** for technology, logistics, and healthcare projects in 2025 alone, signaling that diversification from oil is no longer an aspiration but an economic reality.

Similarly, **Southeast Asia** is witnessing an entrepreneurial renaissance. Startup funding, led by Singapore and Indonesia, exceeded **USD 11 billion in 2025,** catalyzing regional growth in fintech, logistics, and e-commerce. Microsoft's commitment to train **2.5 million people in ASEAN**

on AI and digital skills by 2025 complements India's own Skill India Mission, which now emphasizes international placement and export of certified professionals.

India's participation in these modernization efforts underscores its strategic role as a **workforce enabler.** Over **1–1.5 million Indian professionals migrate annually** for skilled roles across GCC and APAC markets, contributing more than USD 130 **billion in remittances,** the world's highest. These remittances, beyond their financial significance, symbolize the **circulation of knowledge, skills, and innovation** between India and its regional partners.

This evolving relationship is not transactional, it is **symbiotic.** GCC nations gain digital expertise and healthcare excellence; Southeast Asia accesses IT and consulting capabilities; and India, in turn, benefits from technology transfer, investment inflows, and an elevated global talent brand. This shared transformation marks the beginning of a **sustainable workforce architecture** that aligns with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure).

Redefining regional labor models

The boundaries of employment are dissolving across the regions studied in this year's Global Skills Cartography. Gig and freelance ecosystems are no longer peripheral, they are the backbone of a new economic model based on flexibility, project-based specialization, and **AI-augmented productivity.**

Across Asia and the Middle East, **freelance participation has surged by 30–50%,** with the UAE recording a 78% year-on-year increase in freelancer registrations and India hosting **15–20 million professionals** engaged in cross-border gig work (HR Stacks 2025 Report). Platforms like Upwork, Toptal, and Freelancer.com increasingly list remote opportunities requiring **AI, cybersecurity, and data analytics** capabilities, which are roles that align with India's fast-growing pool of digital talent.

The implications reach beyond individual productivity. For enterprises, distributed teams across India, Singapore, and Dubai now function as **borderless project ecosystems,** leveraging digital collaboration and real-time analytics to deliver outcomes faster and more efficiently. For workers, the convergence of gig platforms, AI tools, and secure digital identity systems means **portable reputations, verifiable credentials, and global earning potential.**

In this context, the policies and infrastructure that enable such systems, such as India's Skill Passport Initiative, the UAE's Golden Visa Program, and ASEAN's Digital Credentialing Framework, serve as critical enablers of sustainable talent circulation.

Education, upskilling & the infrastructure of opportunity

The demand for digital talent cannot be met without reimagining education and lifelong learning systems. Across both regions, the education-to-employment continuum is being rebuilt around **AI, EdTech, and industry-aligned credentials.**

The Middle East's AI and EdTech investment is projected to reach **USD 4.2 billion by 2026,** with public-private partnerships leading the charge. Governments in the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar are embedding AI literacy, cybersecurity, and green tech in curricula from secondary to postgraduate levels. The annual Dubai Education Summit 2025 reaffirmed a collective commitment to building a "future-ready" workforce through **experiential and competency-based education.**

India's parallel reforms under NEP 2020 and its collaboration with global accreditation bodies have made its educational exports and degrees more internationally recognized. Joint certification frameworks with Singapore, Australia, and GCC institutions have paved the way for **cross-border academic mobility,** reinforcing India's vision of becoming the **"Skills Capital of the World."**

In Southeast Asia, major initiatives such as SkillsFuture Singapore and Malaysia's National AI Roadmap emphasize lifelong learning and modular credentialing. The blending of **vocational and academic pathways** is now the regional norm, supported by multinational corporations offering direct certification programs in emerging technologies.

These educational and policy shifts collectively build the infrastructure for **inclusive modernization,** ensuring that workers across socioeconomic backgrounds can participate meaningfully in the AI-first global economy. By enabling adaptability, agility, and mobility, these systems directly advance **SDG 4 (Quality Education)** and **SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities).**

The road ahead: shared prosperity through skills, technology & collaboration

As we look toward 2030, the combined forces of **digital transformation, demographic change, and environmental transition** will continue to reshape the nature of talent across Asia and the Middle East. Nations are increasingly recognizing that success in the future of work is not defined by resource endowment but by the **capacity to develop, attract, and empower human capital.**

India's leadership in this transformation is anchored in three key pillars:

- **Human capital export:** Structured, ethical, and digitally verifiable migration supporting global labor needs.
- **AI-augmented productivity:** Equipping the workforce with tools and mindsets to collaborate effectively with automation.
- **Sustainable partnerships:** Aligning trade, talent, and technology strategies with environmental and social goals.

The path forward lies in **collaborative modernization,** where countries co-invest in AI infrastructure, digital credentials, and circular migration programs to create value beyond borders. Whether through India's Skill India International initiatives, GCC's Vision 2030 projects, or ASEAN's AI and Digital Economy Blueprint, the regional consensus is clear: a skilled, adaptable, and tech-enabled workforce is the currency of global growth.

The Asia–Middle East corridor now represents more than a trading partnership. Emerging work and living preferences, interconnected workforces enabled by technology and a future-ready youth population, make this wave of talent mobility a living laboratory for the **future of work,** where gig economies thrive, AI amplifies human potential, and skills form the connective tissue of economic progress.

Redefining skills for the future economy

The Convergence of human & digital intelligence

The accelerating rhythm of technological progress is reshaping not only jobs but the very foundations of human endeavour. Artificial intelligence (AI), automation, and algorithmic decision systems are transforming how individuals learn, communicate, and create. Yet, even as these systems become more capable, they reaffirm the irreplaceable value of human ingenuity. The essence of employability in the age of AI lies not in competing with machines, but in complementing them, combining emotional insight, ethical reasoning, and imaginative problem-solving with the computational precision of intelligent systems.

By 2025, over 40% of global jobs will require advanced digital and cognitive capabilities (World Economic Forum, Future of Jobs Report 2025). However, the skills that define adaptability, creativity, communication, leadership, and critical reasoning, remain inherently human.

Human + digital skills represent this intersection of tech-led career growth:

- *Creativity and design thinking for product innovation and AI-human interaction.*
- *Critical thinking and problem-solving to interpret complex data contexts.*
- *Communication and collaboration to connect distributed teams.*
- *Digital literacy and data analytics for informed decision-making.*
- *Emotional intelligence and resilience to navigate the social impact of automation.*

In this evolving model, learning is continuous and adaptive, integrated into daily work and life, rather than front-loaded at the beginning of a career. Technology amplifies human potential, but only when it is consciously used to enhance cognitive depth, rather than to replace it.

AI systems as amplifiers of human potential

While automation and AI are often described as substitutes for human labor, emerging research suggests they function more effectively as amplifiers of human capacity. When used responsibly, AI technologies extend human reach, accelerate creativity, and augment the depth of cognitive insight.

A recent article in the Journal of Consumer Research (Puntoni et al., 2024), co-authored by Michael Braun, Bart de Langhe, and Eric M. Schwartz, highlights the paradox of this amplification. It explains that AI "expands the human experience by enhancing human capabilities, performance, and creativity," but can also "constrain the range of experiences" available by subtly limiting exploration and self-expression.

The study identifies three key mechanisms that can either empower or restrict human potential:

1. **Agency Transference –** When algorithms make decisions for users, people risk surrendering personal agency, reducing opportunities for serendipity and exploration.
2. **Parametric Reductionism –** Algorithms simplify human identity into quantifiable data points, overlooking nuance, context, and individuality.
3. **Regulated Expression –** The architecture of AI systems can alter how humans express themselves, either by encouraging disclosure through design or suppressing authentic expression through data anxiety.

In policy and education, this dual nature of AI demands a balanced approach, where digital systems serve as instruments for cognitive expansion, not behavioral conditioning. The core challenge for governments, educators, and corporations is to design learning ecosystems that cultivate independent judgment, rather than passive reliance on algorithmic cues.

In a similar commentary "Being Human in the Age of AI," Stefano Puntoni and Klaus Wertenbroch explore the implications of artificial intelligence for marketing practices and society. They argue that behavioral insights are crucial for the safe deployment of AI, addressing issues like bias that arise from the interaction between algorithmic and human decision-making. For the full commentary, see the Journal of the Association for Consumer Research.

Examples of tech-enabled amplifiers in learning & work

AI-powered tools, when aligned with human-centered design, are transforming how individuals build, share, and sustain knowledge. Several examples illustrate this synthesis:

- **Adaptive learning systems:** Platforms like Coursera, Khan Academy, and India's SWAYAM personalize education by tracking learning patterns and suggesting new content dynamically. These tools transform static curricula into living ecosystems that evolve with the learner.
- **AI-augmented creativity tools:** Generative AI (e.g., Adobe Firefly, ChatGPT, DALL·E) empowers designers, writers, and entrepreneurs to iterate ideas faster and visualize concepts that once required entire teams.
- **Collaborative intelligence platforms:** Perplexity AI, Microsoft's Copilot or Google's Gemini embed AI into productivity environments, helping professionals analyze large datasets, generate reports, and brainstorm strategies, all while maintaining human oversight.
- **Remote & immersive workspaces:** Virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) enable hands-on learning and team collaboration in digitally simulated environments, crucial for industries like healthcare, engineering, and logistics.
- **AI career guidance systems:** Platforms such as LinkedIn Learning and IndiaSkills Portal now integrate labor market analytics to guide learners toward emerging professions based on real-time demand.

Each of these innovations demonstrates AI's potential to personalize education, expand creative capacity, and connect talent to opportunity, which are hallmarks of a future-ready workforce.

Social media as a live learning laboratory

Perhaps no technology illustrates the dual nature of AI-enabled amplification of human creativity better than social media. It functions simultaneously as a learning space, a marketplace, and a mirror of human aspiration.

Social media platforms, powered by AI-driven recommendation systems, amplify visibility, democratize access to audiences, and enable new forms of economic participation. However, they also risk shaping human identity through subtle constraints of choice, exposure, and expression.

Positive use cases supporting human-AI synergy

- **Knowledge sharing:** LinkedIn and X (formerly Twitter) allow professionals to build personal brands through micro-learning, peer mentoring, and thought leadership.
- **Skill monetization:** YouTube, Instagram, and Patreon empower creators to transform niche expertise into income, redefining the boundary between passion and profession.
- **AI-augmented creativity:** TikTok's content generation tools and Meta's AI editing features enable creative experimentation at scale.
- **Career discovery:** AI-curated feeds and job recommendations on LinkedIn personalize opportunity discovery for millions of early-career professionals.
- **Community-driven learning:** Platforms like GitHub, Discord and Reddit host collaborative learning spaces where global communities exchange ideas on coding, art, and entrepreneurship.

These examples reflect the transformative promise of algorithmic ecosystems, their ability to amplify learning, innovation, and collaboration. Yet, as the Journal of Consumer Research warns, unchecked algorithmic reinforcement can also reduce serendipity, promoting homogenization in what people see, learn, and aspire toward.

In-demand skills & job examples

SKILL	WHERE VALUED/ USE CASE (GLOBAL, 2025)	EXAMPLE
Creativity	Content creation, branding, product design, AI/UX	Building viral campaigns for brands; designing GenAI products
Communication	Customer success, consulting, BPO, healthcare	Managing cross-border teams; patient counseling
Leadership	Startups, consulting, project management	Leading a global remote team on a digital transformation
Problem solving	Engineering, consulting, logistics	Solving supply chain disruptions in manufacturing
Analytical reasoning	Data analytics, fintech, market research	Identifying sales drivers using big data
Adaptability	Gig work, fast-scaling startups, change management	Shifting from in-office to AI-augmented hybrid work
Time management	Freelancing, multi-client services, remote project teams	Delivering multiple deadlines in consulting/freelancing
Critical thinking	Policy, law, academia, tech, business intelligence	Diagnosing risk in cybersecurity with AI
Digital literacy	Every sector (AI, healthcare, education, government)	Running online campaigns, automating workflow
Emotional intelligence	Tech, services, professional services, HR	Harmonizing a multicultural gig team with empathy
Teamwork	Product, agile, and project teams	Building software remotely in distributed teams
Data analysis	AI, e-commerce, healthcare, finance	Forecasting demand with ML in retail
Interpersonal skills	Negotiation, management, entrepreneurship	Winning global contracts as a freelancer
Leadership skills	Digital strategy, change management, mission-critical operations	Heading a health-tech expansion in the Middle East

SKILL	WHERE VALUED/ USE CASE (GLOBAL, 2025)	EXAMPLE
Management	Project-based work, entrepreneurship, cross-border business	Scaling B2B SaaS with distributed gig teams
Project management	Construction, ICT projects, agency/freelance platforms	Delivering a cross-regional AI platform on budget
Active learning	IT, AI, creative industries	Upskilling continuously via MOOCs/certifications
Artificial intelligence	HR, banking, retail, marketing, logistics	Deploying AI-driven fraud detection in fintech
Computer literacy	Admin, data entry, support, financial modeling	Automating repetitive tasks in accounting
Flexibility	Gig/remote work, crisis response, travel/hospitality	Launching rapid-response delivery services
Collaboration	Startup studios, co-working, global product launches	Coordinating project releases with international partners
Initiative	B2B sales, new ventures, social enterprise	Launching a new AI-powered gig platform
Resilience	Healthcare, gig platforms, high-pressure sales	Navigating economic shocks in the gig/freelance sector
Continuous learning	Tech, education, research, government	Earning micro-credentials to remain relevant in AI economy

India's skilling transition: education, policy & private innovation

India's National Education Policy (NEP 2020) and accompanying digital initiatives mark a paradigm shift in the national approach to human capital development. With over 65% of its population under 35 and an average age of 28.4 years (UNDP, 2025), India has both the demographic advantage and the developmental responsibility to prepare its youth for a future without borders.

Overview of education reforms in India

The CBSE AI curriculum is now being introduced from Class III, impacting more than 21 million students by 2027.

- SOAR (Skilling for AI Readiness) trains teachers and students in responsible AI use and ethics.
- Experiential learning models emphasize project-based education, students now learn coding, data interpretation, and problem-solving through real-world simulations.
- Platforms like DIKSHA, PM e-Vidya, and NIELIT bridge the gap between classroom learning and industry needs, reaching millions across rural and urban regions.

The role of private sector & edtech

Privatization has accelerated innovation. Indian universities such as BITS Pilani, IIT Bombay, Amity University, and SRM Institute of Science and Technology are integrating AI-driven learning management systems, virtual labs, and micro-credentialing into their academic models. Platforms like UpGrad, Simplilearn, and Coursera India have created a thriving ecosystem of short-format, skill-based certifications that directly connect to industry demand.

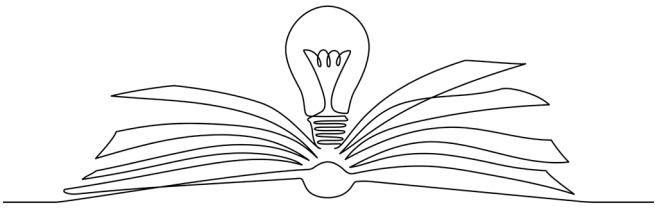
These institutions and platforms form the bridge between education and employability, preparing graduates not just to find jobs, but to invent them.

Experiential learning & employability in the gig economy

The gig and freelance economy, valued between USD 455–646 billion globally (Carry, 2025), exemplifies the demand for applied, demonstrable skills over traditional credentials. In India, an estimated 60 million professionals now participate in gig and freelance work, with projections of 90 million by 2030 (HR Stacks, 2025).

Experiential learning, through digital internships, entrepreneurial projects, or platform-based work, is rapidly becoming the most credible way to build employability. Employers increasingly value proof of ability, digital portfolios, project outcomes, and peer reviews, over academic transcripts.

This model of work offers both autonomy and accountability, fostering adaptive learning behaviors such as self-discipline, resilience, and active collaboration, skills that cannot be automated.



AI as an enabler of experiential learning

AI technologies today act as both mentor and collaborator. Intelligent systems help freelancers, creators, and professionals discover opportunities, refine skills, and amplify productivity. Personalized learning platforms now tailor content to an individual's pace and goals, mirroring the self-directed structure of gig work. Yet, as AI tools simplify complex workflows, there is a growing need to ensure that humans remain in control of their learning and decision-making. Maintaining "humans in the loop" not only prevents **de-skilling** but also preserves creativity, independence, and agency, the very qualities that define a resilient workforce.

Balancing human agency & algorithmic assistance

Today's digital platforms use AI to recommend courses, clients, or content, but they must be designed to **enhance serendipity and autonomy,** not replace them. Research shows that while algorithmic suggestions can improve efficiency, excessive automation may reduce curiosity and limit exposure to diverse experiences. A balanced design, where users can choose between personalized accuracy and open-ended discovery, ensures that technology becomes a **partner in exploration,** not a filter on potential.

Digital empathy & identity in the AI age

Human interaction with technology is reshaping not only how people learn but also how they express identity. Predictive personalization, seen in everyday tools like streaming recommendations or portfolio platforms, reinforces a sense of self that is partially shaped by algorithms. This feedback loop can inspire creativity when managed thoughtfully, but can also narrow self-perception when overly prescriptive. Education and design policies must therefore cultivate **digital empathy,** the understanding of how algorithmic interactions influence personal growth and social behavior.

Towards inclusive AI skilling & policy innovation

India's demographic advantage, **a workforce with an average age of 28.4 years,** presents both urgency and opportunity. To sustain its rise as the world's skills capital, the nation must scale **AI-ready learning ecosystems** that empower every learner, from schoolchildren to senior professionals. Policies such as **NEP 2020, SOAR (Skilling for AI Readiness),** and **Skill India Digital** are foundational, but true transformation requires deeper alignment across academia, industry, and government.

Industrial leaders and innovators must invest in AI-driven training programs, mentorship networks, and inclusive digital infrastructure. Policymakers must prioritize **data ethics, transparency, and accessibility,** ensuring that talent from Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities, often the most entrepreneurial and underrepresented, has equal access to the tools of the future.

AI-supplemented work: redefining roles, not replacing people

AI does not eliminate work; it redistributes it. Nearly 40% of Indian gig and IT professionals already use AI tools to enhance productivity, automating content generation, predictive analytics, and client support.

Yet, human intervention remains central. As AI takes on repetitive processes, roles evolve toward interpretation, judgment, ethics, and design. The future workplace will demand not coders alone but problem framers, people capable of contextualizing and applying AI solutions responsibly.

This hybrid paradigm of AI-supplemented work underscores the growing importance of AI literacy, an understanding of how AI systems think, decide, and err. Policymakers must therefore treat AI fluency as a civic competency, not a specialist skill.

Diversity, inclusion & infrastructure as the driving force

Sustainable skill development cannot exist in isolation from social inclusion and infrastructure. India's workforce diversity, linguistic, gendered, regional, and economic, represents untapped potential for innovation.

- Women's participation in the workforce is projected to rise to 47.5% by 2025 (India Skills Report), aided by flexible, hybrid work options, and in the following pages of this year's report we explore the rise of women-led India.
- Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities are emerging as digital talent hubs, supported by Digital India infrastructure and GCC (Global Capability Centre) expansions.
- Public-private partnerships in skilling, such as Microsoft's Future Ready Talent and Google's Digital Unlocked, are democratizing access to technology and mentorship.

Inclusivity here is not a moral imperative alone, but an economic multiplier. A diverse workforce enhances creativity, expands problem-solving perspectives, and strengthens the resilience of organizations.

Building a policy & academic compass for the future

India's talent transformation requires a strategic synchronization between policy, academia, and industry:

- **Policy:** Ensure labor codes, data governance, and skill certifications keep pace with platform-based and AI-driven employment models.
- **Academia:** Redesign curricula around learning agility, ethics, and digital collaboration.
- **Industry:** Co-create skilling pipelines and experiential platforms that reflect live market needs.

The emerging model of "learning ecosystems," shared between universities, corporations, and government agencies, offers a blueprint for the future. The emphasis is shifting from degrees to lifelong learning credentials, from employment to employability, from formal education to continuous reinvention.

To realize this potential, the people must invest in digital infrastructure and in the human imagination that powers it. By nurturing adaptable thinkers, inclusive institutions, and AI-aware citizens, India will not merely participate in the future economy, it will shape it.

Key drivers of the future of work across key sectors

Accelerated innovation leading to growth

India's workforce transformation is accelerating across industries, fueled by AI adoption, digital infrastructure, and a growing culture of continuous learning. Each sector's growth trajectory points to a common theme, technology-driven opportunity matched by human adaptability. Below is a sector-wise view of emerging opportunities, in-demand roles, and the skills shaping India's future of work.

1. Information Technology & AI

The IT and AI industry is expanding at a 14% CAGR, expected to exceed USD 350 billion by 2025 (IBEF, 2025)

Nearly 93% of Indian business leaders plan to deploy AI agents to augment workforce capacity, and 59% of frontier firms already operate with AI-human collaboration models (Microsoft Work Trend Index, 2025).

Emerging job roles:

AI/ML engineers, data scientists, cloud architects, prompt engineers, and AI policy analysts.

Key insight:

AI-driven workflows can enhance productivity by 2.61% annually by 2030, impacting up to 38 million jobs as businesses redesign roles around AI collaboration (EY AIdea of India, 2025).

The focus is shifting from coding to co-creating with machines, where analytical thinking, ethics, and communication will be as valuable as technical ability.

2. Renewable energy

With India's net-zero commitments driving investment, the renewable energy sector is growing at 17% CAGR (ICICI Direct, 2025). Clean energy innovation is now central to both national infrastructure and global partnerships.

Emerging job roles:

Renewable energy technicians, solar and wind engineers, sustainability analysts, and climate data specialists.

Key insight:

Digitally enabled project monitoring, smart grids, and IoT-driven maintenance are redefining roles. Skills in data analytics, predictive maintenance, and sustainability modeling will drive employability. The sector's expansion offers large-scale opportunities for India's semi-skilled and technical workforce transitioning from traditional energy industries.

3. Healthcare & life sciences

India's healthcare and pharma sectors are growing at 12% CAGR, powered by digital health platforms, telemedicine, and biotech innovation (Chegg India, 2025).

Emerging job roles:

Healthcare data managers, bioinformatics analysts, telehealth specialists, and clinical AI integrators.

Key insight:

The fusion of AI and healthcare, from diagnostics to remote care, demands professionals who can blend empathy with data skills. Digital literacy, regulatory understanding, and data ethics are vital as AI augments care delivery and precision medicine expands access.

4. Financial services & fintech

FinTech remains India's fastest-growing sector, expanding at 20% CAGR, with UPI, insurtech, and digital loans transforming financial inclusion.

Emerging job roles:

Digital risk analysts, blockchain developers, AI fraud specialists, cybersecurity managers, and UX designers for financial platforms.

Key insight:

FinTech's success lies in trust through transparency. Human oversight in financial algorithms, along with ethical AI design, will shape how India sustains global leadership in inclusive finance. Skills in compliance, behavioral analytics, and data storytelling will define the next generation of digital finance professionals.

5. E-commerce & supply chain

E-commerce is accelerating at 18% CAGR, driven by logistics innovation, digital payments, and social commerce adoption.

Emerging job roles:

E-commerce operations leads, fulfillment coordinators, logistics data scientists, and customer experience (CX) managers.

Key insight:

Automation and AI-driven analytics now govern real-time supply chains, while human adaptability ensures flexibility during disruptions. Demand for data visualization, process optimization, and customer empathy continues to rise in omnichannel retail and digital logistics.

6. Education & skilling (edtech)

The EdTech sector is projected to expand at 15% CAGR, democratizing access to global education through AI tutors and adaptive platforms (QS Future of Work Index, 2025).

Emerging job roles:

AI curriculum designers, learning experience (LX) architects, instructional technologists, and ed-data analysts.

Key insight:

AI-enhanced learning tools are enabling personalized education at scale. Platforms like SWAYAM and Microsoft's Future Ready Talent have already trained over 320,000 Indians in AI competencies this year (PIB, 2025). The future classroom is hybrid, data-driven, and lifelong.

7. Women's workforce & inclusive employment

India's female labor force participation in the formal sector has nearly doubled, rising from 23.3% in 2017–18 to 41.7% in 2023–24, with rural participation at a record 37.9% (New Indian Express, 2025).

Emerging job roles:

Women are leading in digital entrepreneurship, design, FinTech, and STEM innovation. Hybrid work and digital platforms are enabling flexible participation in formal sectors.

Key insight:

The growth of remote and hybrid models has reduced traditional barriers, allowing more women to join and lead in high-value digital roles. Continuous learning and mentorship ecosystems are essential to sustain this inclusion momentum.

8. Regional digital hubs & tier-2 expansion

Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities like Chandigarh, Jaipur, and Indore are emerging as innovation centers, contributing to a 20% rise in tech employment outside metros (ETS ISR Report, 2025 findings).

Emerging job roles:

Software developers, digital marketers, GCC support analysts, and AI project managers.

Key insight:

India's distributed digital economy is bridging opportunity gaps, talent no longer needs to move to opportunity, because opportunity is moving to talent.

The human equation in a digital future

India's transformation into an AI-first economy isn't just about automation, it's about enhancing human capacity. Across all sectors, the future of work depends on three shared capabilities:

1. **Adaptability:** Continuous learning is the new currency of employability.
2. **Empathy:** As AI scales efficiency, empathy safeguards human value.
3. **Ethical stewardship:** Responsible design and use of technology determine its societal impact.

By combining these strengths with technology's precision, India's workforce can not only meet global demand but shape the next frontier of inclusive, intelligent growth.

Guidelines for responsible AI-enhanced work

To build a productive and ethical AI-supplemented workforce, professionals are urged to balance technology's power with human judgment. The following principles serve as practical directives to use AI tools responsibly, creatively, and effectively:

1. Learn with AI, not from It

Use AI as a partner in thinking, not a substitute for it. Let automation handle repetitive work while you focus on creativity, problem-solving, and strategy. Keep questioning outputs and refining them, critical thinking is your best safeguard against blind automation.

2. Encourage serendipity & exploration

Don't rely only on what algorithms recommend. Explore outside your usual interests to expand your knowledge and creativity. Curiosity adds the context and discovery that AI cannot predict.

3. Stay "In the Loop"

Avoid full dependence on AI tools. Always review and guide outputs, make final decisions yourself, and use each project as a chance to practice judgment and build mastery. Oversight builds confidence and prevents skill erosion.

4. Balance standardization with creativity

Use standardized AI systems for routine, compliance-driven tasks, but allow room for flexibility when solving new or complex problems. Innovation happens where structured efficiency meets human imagination.

5. Protect your digital identity

Be mindful of how much you share with AI systems and online platforms. Maintain authenticity and privacy in digital interactions, what you post, type, or create should reflect your genuine voice, not what algorithms reward.

6. Lead with human skills

Empathy, curiosity, adaptability, and ethical reasoning are your core strengths in the AI economy. Use them to design, supervise, and question technology. Let these qualities guide how you collaborate with AI and with others.

7. Redefine success around human agency

Success in the AI age isn't measured by speed alone, it's defined by how responsibly humans guide technology toward better outcomes. Use AI to amplify your impact, not diminish your role in shaping it.

AI isn't perfect & perfection isn't the goal

Building a Sustainable Future of Work

As India accelerates toward an AI-empowered economy, the conversation must move beyond the hype of automation and into the realm of responsible innovation. The true value of AI lies not in flawless efficiency, but in its ability to **complement human intelligence,** to empower people, industries, and ecosystems to work smarter, not just faster.

Across India's formal and informal sectors, AI is now woven into daily operations. In **banking and financial services,** AI models detect fraud and streamline lending for millions of small borrowers. In **agriculture,** predictive analytics platforms like **KisanGPT** and **DeHaat AI** are helping farmers anticipate weather patterns, optimize irrigation, and improve yields. **Healthcare startups** such as Qure.ai and Niramai are leveraging AI for early diagnostics, extending access to rural populations once excluded from quality care.

The **Government of India's National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence (NITI Aayog)** and initiatives like **IndiaAI Mission** and **Bhashini**—the multilingual AI language project, emphasize **inclusion, ethics, and accountability** as the cornerstones of AI development. Together, these programs are building frameworks that promote fairness and transparency across applications in education, governance, and citizen services.

At the same time, India's **climate-tech and EdTech sectors** are proving that innovation and sustainability can co-exist. EdTech platforms now reach more than **150 million learners,** making digital literacy a national movement. In climate technology, startups are deploying AI to monitor soil health, manage waste, and optimize renewable energy grids, bridging economic growth with environmental stewardship.

Balancing AI's energy demands is equally critical. Globally, data centers account for nearly **2% of electricity consumption,** and this figure could triple by 2030. India's leadership through the **International Solar Alliance (ISA)** offers a blueprint for sustainable digital growth, powering emerging **AI data centers with renewable energy** and driving the transition toward low-emission innovation.

Globally, the **BRICS nations,** Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa—are aligning their innovation goals with the **UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, prioritizing climate resilience, equitable growth, and digital inclusion. This cooperative vision underscores a shared understanding: ***AI must serve humanity, not the other way around.***

India's future of work will not be defined by perfect machines, but by **imperfect humans guided by purpose, empathy, and responsibility.** Perfection is not the goal, sustainability is. The next phase of India's growth depends on how effectively its workforce can harmonize **technological ambition with human values,** ensuring progress that is both inclusive and enduring.

Talent demand in the future of work

The rise of a flexible, tech-powered workforce

India's workforce transformation is no longer confined to boardrooms or IT parks, it's happening in homes, co-working spaces, villages, and virtual platforms. The **gig and freelance economy,** valued between **USD 455–646 billion globally,** has become a cornerstone of modern employment, bridging flexibility with financial independence.

Fueled by **AI adoption, remote work, and entrepreneurship,** India's labour market is evolving into a **hybrid ecosystem** where traditional hierarchies are replaced by project-based collaboration and digital ownership. The country's **60 million+ gig professionals,** projected to grow to **90 million by 2030,** are redefining what it means to be employable in the digital age.

This transformation is being accelerated by 4 key trends:

- **AI-powered platforms** that match freelancers to global projects through predictive skill mapping.
- **Remote work models** adopted by both startups and corporates, expanding opportunities beyond metros.
- **Creative and cultural entrepreneurship,** especially in design, gaming, and arts, where 40% of independent creators report income growth through digital platforms.
- **Government skilling and innovation programs,** such as the **AI Workforce Acceleration Plan (AIWAP)** aiming to create **4 million AI-linked jobs by 2030.**

Talent demand trends across flexible work models

India's **startup ecosystem,** the third largest globally, now employs millions in flexible and AI-linked roles. Cities like **Jaipur, Pune, and Indore** are emerging as **remote-first talent hubs,** offering lower costs and a higher quality of life.

Meanwhile, AI and automation are **augmenting—not replacing—human expertise** in education, healthcare, logistics, and finance.

MODEL	EMERGING JOB ROLES	KEY DRIVERS	HUMAN-CENTRIC SKILLS IN DEMAND
Gig & Freelance Work	Content creators, developers, project managers, data analysts	Platformization, creator economy	Time management, digital marketing, adaptability
AI Supplemented Work	AI trainers, data validators, prompt engineers	Generative AI, automation tools	Critical thinking, ethical reasoning, oversight
Remote Work	CX specialists, HR consultants, UX/UI designers	Cloud collaboration, hybrid teams	Communication, self-management, cross-cultural agility
Entrepreneurship & Startups	Digital founders, SaaS developers, edtech mentors	Access to funding, digital infrastructure	Leadership, innovation, resilience

Humanizing the digital economy

Behind every algorithmic match or remote contract lies a human story of aspiration and adaptation. The gig economy has:

- Enabled **millions of women** to rejoin the workforce via flexible, home-based work.
- Given **regional youth** access to global income through AI translation, customer support, and digital services.
- Provided **creative freedom** for artists, educators, and coders through independent monetization platforms like **Decentro, Whizz,** and **HelloPebl.**

AI and human talent are now co-creators in the new world of work. But as opportunities grow, so does the responsibility to ensure fair pay, data ethics, and social protection, especially in informal digital labor markets.

The gig economy & freelancing: growth in role specialization & platforms

Comparative framework: platform-based vs. broad gig economy estimates

ASPECT	INDIA	GLOBAL
Market Size (Broad Gig Economy)	~$455B (2024)	Likely >$2T (unreported)
Market Size (Platform-Based Gig Economy)	Estimated subset of $455B for all gig work	~$582.2B (2025) for platform based gig work only
CAGR	17% overall; 21% platform-based	15.79% (platform-based)
Workforce Share	~2% (12M workers)	~12% (435M workers)
Income Levels	~$2,700/year	~$24,000/year
Top Roles	IT/Coding, Data Science, Content Creation, Design, Tutoring,Consulting	Sales & Biz Dev, Data Entry, 3D Animation,IT/Coding, Data Science, Digital Marketing

India's gig economy looks larger because it counts both platform gigs and informal hybrid work, not just app-based roles. Though earnings per worker are lower, the scale of transactions and job diversity push the market value up. India's platform segment is expanding faster than the global average and is projected to reach ~90M workers by 2030 — small share today, but massive growth potential driven by low cost of living and rapid digitization.

Notable gig/platforms in India

PLATFORM	FOCUS AREA	DETAILS/ DESCRIPTION
Upwork, Fiverr	Broad freelancing	Global reach, digital content, programming, marketing
Chegg India	Tutoring, Academic support	Students, teachers; AI and expert-driven remote tutoring
GigZoe	B2B services, marketplace	AI video, animation, website development, content services, and B2B gig hiring
Truelancer	SMEs, global freelance	600,000+ Indian users, secure project-based gigs
Freelancer	IT, writing, design, consulting	Project bidding & remote work

Women compose 28%+ of the gig workforce across arts, culture, music, and writing, higher than India's non-creative sector (24%) and rising.

AI-supplemented workforce: in-demand roles & tech enablers

Key jobs & digital tools

The **AI-supplemented workforce** is rapidly reshaping industries, with emerging roles and technologies driving a new wave of digital productivity. **AI/ML engineers and data scientists** are in highest demand, recording over **600% growth in job postings**, powered by tools like TensorFlow, Python, and Azure AI across IT, BFSI, healthcare, and retail.

Digital marketers are leveraging AI-driven platforms such as HubSpot, Meta tools, and Google Ads to refine audience targeting in e-commerce and services. In creative sectors like media, publishing, and EdTech, **content creators and designers** now use Canva, Adobe AI, and Lumen5 to produce generative and animated content for global markets.

Meanwhile, **customer experience specialists** rely on AI-enabled solutions like Zendesk, Intercom, and ChatGPT to automate routine interactions while maintaining human oversight.

Cybersecurity analysts deploy intelligent defense tools such as Splunk and FireEye to predict, prevent, and manage threats across IT, government, and finance. In healthcare, **data analysts** harness IBM Watson, Health BI, and Salesforce for AI-assisted diagnosis and operational analytics.

Finally, **project and platform managers** across industries use Asana, Monday, and Jira enhanced with AI capabilities to optimize resources and collaboration, illustrating how artificial intelligence now underpins every function of the modern digital enterprise.

India targets 4 million new AI workforce jobs by 2030 via policy, upskilling, and AI adoption in every major sector.

Remote work & entrepreneurial ecosystems: key to digital India

Latest data & examples

FACTOR	EXAMPLE INITIATIVES/REGIONS	DATA POINTS/HIGHLIGHTS
Remote Work Infrastructure	TCS 25/25 (hybrid), Infosys flexi-hybrid, Zoho rural offices	70%+ firms offer hybrid/ remote options; Infosys targets 33% remote by 2030; Zoho expands in Tier-3 towns
Startup Incubators	Telangana T-Hub, Kerala Startup Mission, NASSCOM 10K, Gujarat GIFT City	122 unicorns; 1.57 lakh DPIIT-recognized startups; 51% from Tier-2/3 cities
Self Employment Index	36% of India's workforce is self-employed; gig economy worth $455B; 21% CAGR	
Sectors Poised for Growth	Tech, EdTech, FinTech, Health, Logistics, Arts & Music	9% job market growth projected in 2025; IT hiring up 15%, retail 12%, telecom 11%
Tier-2/3 City Boom	Jaipur, Coimbatore, Indore, Chandigarh	38–45% surge in tech jobs; cities like Indore, Bhubaneswar, and Jaipur emerging as tech hubs

The Indian culture sector has ~11M women creative professionals, craft/music/dance gigs gain international exposure.

Major gig/remote work platforms in India

PLATFORM	FOCUS	USER BASE / HIGHLIGHTS
Upwork	Freelance work across IT, design, writing, consulting	Widely used by Indian professionals for global remote contracts; INR payouts supported
Fiverr	Quick freelance gigs in creative, tech, and marketing	Popular among Indian freelancers for short-term, fixed-price projects
Chegg India	Tutoring, academic support, e-learning	Strong presence in Tier-2/3 cities; used by students and educators
Urban Company	Local services (home repairs, beauty, cleaning)	India's leading platform for gig-based local services; replaces TaskRabbit in context
Ola / Uber	Ride-hailing and logistics	Millions of gig drivers; Ola expanding into EV and delivery services
Truelancer	Freelance projects in digital, IT, creative domains	1M+ users; INR payouts, UPI support; strong Tier-2 city presence
GigZoe	B2B contracts for SMEs (tech, marketing, admin)	Verified freelancers for small businesses; growing in Tier-2/3 hubs
Etsy India	Handmade goods, crafts, art	Used by Indian artisans and creators; global reach for niche products
Moj/Sharechat	Regional content creation, influencer marketing	300M+ users combined; monetization via creator funds, brand deals, and live commerce

Music, dance, art, and digital content are now mainstream gig income areas, supported by remote concerts, platformization, and social media monetization.

Social impact: women, children, & fair work

Women in workforce (India, 2025)

METRIC	VERIFIED DATA
Overall Workforce Participation	34.1% (as of September 2025) among women aged 15+ (formal + informal)
Rural Women Employment	37.9% Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) among rural women
Worker Population Ratio (WPR)	36.3% for rural women; 32.3% overall for women
Trend	Up from 22% in 2019 to 34.1% in 2025, indicating a 12.1 percentage point increase

Creative, consulting, education, and gig content roles have OUTSIZED women's participation, offering equalizing income potential.

The dual narrative: progress amid persistent inequality

Child labor enforcement: gains & gaps

In **2024–25**, India rescued **53,651 children** from exploitation, with **40,414** rescued from child labor alone. Over **27,000 rescue operations** were conducted, leading to **9,595 FIRs** and **5,809 arrests.**

Yet, enforcement remains uneven. **Rural underreporting,** weak inter-agency coordination, and loopholes in family enterprise exemptions continue to obscure the true scale of exploitation.

Economic expansion: uneven opportunity

India's fastest-growing sectors, **technology, fintech, food processing, pharmaceuticals, and renewable energy,** are expanding at **double-digit rates,** creating new jobs and wealth.

But the benefits are not evenly distributed. Informal workers, especially in rural and semi-urban areas, remain outside formal protections and income stability.

Wage reform: promise meets delay

India's **four new labor codes** consolidate **29 outdated laws,** aiming to extend **minimum wage and social security** to gig and platform workers.

However, **implementation is staggered** across states, with many still finalizing rules. Gig workers continue to face **wage theft,** lack of grievance redressal, and algorithmic control.

Digital transparency: A mixed reality

Platforms like **e-Shram** and **state-level gig worker registries** (e.g., Rajasthan's Gig Workers Act) have begun formalizing gig work. They offer **digital income trails,** but enforcement of fair pay and benefits remains inconsistent.

Education & awareness: the cornerstones of change

School retention & skilling

Programs like **Samagra Shiksha, PM e-Vidya,** and **Skill India** have expanded access to education and vocational training. Over **2 crore adult learners** have been reached, and **88.9 lakh declared literate** under ULLAS.

Yet, dropout rates remain high in vulnerable communities, and many children still lack access to safe, inclusive learning environments.

Educator empowerment

Initiatives like **NISHTHA** and **PM SHRI** are improving teacher training and digital access. But rural schools still face **teacher shortages,** infrastructure gaps, and limited digital connectivity.

The way forward: a call for collective action

India's fight against child labor and unfair wages must be **multi-sectoral and sustained.** Progress demands collaboration between **government, industry, civil society, and citizens.**

Key pathways to progress

- **Corporate accountability:** Enforce child-labor-free supply chains and ethical sourcing.
- **Community vigilance:** Empower local networks to detect and report exploitation.
- **Education for all:** Ensure universal access to schooling, nutrition, and safety.
- **Digital inclusion:** Expand connectivity and skill access in underserved regions.
- **Policy continuity:** Accelerate labor code implementation and gig worker protections.

India's digital transformation, skilling initiatives, and wage reforms show that **growth and equity can coexist.** The same platforms that power the gig economy can also **protect workers.** The same technology that drives global trade can **safeguard children.**

But the road ahead requires **vigilance, compassion, and accountability.** By combining **data-driven policy, grassroots education,** and **inclusive governance,** India can redefine success, not just by GDP, but by the **dignity and opportunity it creates for every citizen.**

Sectoral demand & evolving talent ecosystem

The nation's employment growth is now defined by skill specialization rather than sector size. Core industries such as manufacturing, BFSI, and healthcare are seeing rapid digital infusion, while emerging fields like green tech and AI are creating **new occupational categories.**

SECTOR	EVOLVING TRENDS	TALENT DYNAMICS
BFSI & FinTech	Fintech is redefining financial services through AI, blockchain, and automation. Upskilling initiatives with IIMs and IITs are bridging compliance, risk, and data analytics talent.	Surge in demand for AI analysts, compliance experts, and cloud finance engineers.
Healthcare & Life Sciences	Global health shortages are prompting rapid MedTech and telehealth adoption.	Expansion of AI-health professionals, biotech researchers, and digital clinicians.
Automotive & EV	The EV revolution is turning mechanical jobs into mechatronic and AI-enabled roles.	High demand for EV engineers, mobility designers, and sustainability analysts.
Renewable Energy & ESG	Green tech and circular economy initiatives dominate new job creation.	Growth in ESG reporting, carbon analytics, and clean energy system design.
Manufacturing & Industry 4.0	Factories are integrating robotics and IoT; workforce roles shift from operation to optimization.	Rise in automation specialists and digital twin engineers.
Agriculture & Biotech	Agritech startups and biotech labs drive digital transformation in farming and food safety.	Increased hiring for bioengineers, food technologists, and analytics specialists.
Creative & Entertainment	India's creator economy employs millions through streaming, AR/VR,	Jobs in content production, UX, gaming, and storytelling expand exponentially.

*The intersection of digital infrastructure, AI, and sustainability goals is creating "***techno-human" professions,** *roles that blend technical skill with creative, ethical, and adaptive thinking.*

Innovation through academia-industry partnerships

India's universities are no longer just producing graduates, they are incubating innovators. Collaborative programs between premier institutes and corporations have led to **micro-skilling models** that match industry needs with academic depth.

Trends driving innovation:

- **Co-designed curricula:** Industry experts contribute to university course development in AI, robotics, and ESG.
- **Stackable credentials:** Modular learning paths allow professionals to reskill without leaving the workforce.
- **R&D integration:** Universities like IIT Madras and BITS Pilani run **industry innovation labs** that translate research into commercial applications.
- **Healthcare innovation:** AIIMS, JIPMER, and Apollo are blending clinical research with MedTech startups.
- **Sustainability alignment:** IIM Ahmedabad's ESG Centre and IIT Bombay's solar research programs are embedding climate intelligence into business education.

These collaborations create a feedback loop between employers and educators, ensuring that India's academic output aligns with the real-time evolution of jobs.

Cross-sector talent opportunities & key innovation areas

India's growth story is no longer limited to IT services; it now spans **AI, clean energy, health innovation, and creative technology.**

- **AI & automation:** Contributing over **$450B to the global economy,** India is developing autonomous systems, chatbots, and decision models that improve productivity while creating **human oversight roles.**
- **Green tech & ESG:** From waste management to solar analytics, India's sustainability initiatives are merging environmental responsibility with profitable innovation.
- **Agritech:** Precision farming, data-driven irrigation, and AI-based crop management are **transforming rural employability** and empowering grassroots entrepreneurship.

- **Creative tech:** The AR/VR and gaming industries are attracting young freelancers and digital creators, signaling a convergence between entertainment and technology.
- **Healthcare & biotech:** AI in diagnostics and bioinformatics accelerates access to affordable care and global clinical collaboration.
- **AI integration:** India leads globally in **AI skill penetration,** with AI now a baseline competency in most digital roles.
- **Green transition:** Workforce participation in clean energy and ESG projects is accelerating as India pushes toward net-zero goals.
- **Decentralized workforce:** Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities are becoming **innovation hubs,** decentralizing tech employment.
- **Inclusive growth:** Women's workforce participation is rising, particularly in digital, financial, and creative sectors.
- **Lifelong learning:** Micro-skilling, digital credentials, and online universities are reshaping employability models.

Mapping India's talent to the future of work

India's talent advantage

India's ability to harness demographic strength for innovation will depend on how effectively it connects policy, education, and enterprise. The **National Education Policy (NEP 2020)**, coupled with **Skill India**, has set a foundation for lifelong learning, while **Digital India and AI Mission initiatives** are ensuring equitable digital access. As explored in this year's India Skills Report 2026 Talent Demand and Supply Analysis, the upward trajectory in employability and increased demand for highly skilled professionals indicates a positive shift towards the future of work.

However, challenges persist:

- The **pace of curriculum reform** must keep up with emerging technologies.
- **Energy-efficient AI infrastructure** and **climate-aligned job creation** will define sustainable growth.
- Stronger incentives are needed for **industry investment in vocational and rural upskilling.**

Despite these hurdles, India's model stands out for its inclusivity, from rural **innovators to research scientists, from creators to coders,** the nation's workforce is both youthful and adaptive.

Sectoral demand for qualified professionals

The sector-wise hiring and skills table, based on the latest data from government and private research publications indicates a positive growth in labour force participation, and increased diversification across sectors.Exploring the trends across industries gives early career aspirations and entrepreneurs a compass to navigate the evolving industry landscape. With increased investment in global markets, India's talent economy and industrial edge is sharpening. The question is, will India's youth move with the momentum towards our vision for 2047?

India's sectoral hiring & skills trends: 2026 snapshot

SECTOR	HIRING/JOB GROWTH	IN-DEMAND ROLES/SKILLS
BFSI, Fintech	8.7% growth in FY25–26; 250K jobs by 2030	AI/ML engineers, credit risk analysts, compliance, digital ops, cybersecurity
Healthcare, Life Sci	62% YoY growth in March 2025; 52% hiring intent	AI-health, telemedicine, clinical data, diagnostics, elderly care
Automotive/EV	200K skilled workers needed by 2030; 50L workforce by 2026	Battery tech, EV motor design, cybersecurity, AI, data analytics
Renewable Energy/ESG	1.02M jobs in 2023; 17L jobs projected via PM Surya Ghar	Solar PV, wind ops, green hydrogen, ESG analysts, grid automation
Utilities, Logistics	22M employed; 80K truck driver shortage; 4.7% formally skilled	Digital supply chain, warehouse ops, IoT, GST/TDS compliance
FMCG, Retail, Food	32% fresher hiring intent in H2FY24; 12.6% CAGR in food processing	Market research, supply chain, brand mgmt, food engineers
Manufacturing, Engg	5.4% net employment change; 58% hiring intent	Smart factory ops, lean manufacturing, automation, ERP, plant design
Agriculture, Biotech	4.9% CAGR; 10K+ startups by 2025	Plant genomics, agri-tech, aquaculture, food safety, biotech R&D
Entertainment/Media	9.7% annual growth; 2.35 crore gig workers by 2030	Content creation, editing, distribution, digital media, gaming
Pharma/Vet/Botany	62% job surge in 2025; $130B market by 2030	R&D chemists, biosimilars, AI-drug discovery, regulatory science, clinical trials

Largest employing sectors by workforce share

This table illustrates **India's largest employing sectors by workforce share in 2025**, along with a **formal vs informal employment breakdown.** As we delve deeper into India's labour market, we discover the untapped potential of a young workforce, the opportunities for reform and growing demand for specialized skills.

India's workforce sectoral share

SECTOR	WORKFORCE SHARE (%)
Agriculture	45.8%
Construction	13.0%
Trade, Hotels, Restaurants	12.0%
Manufacturing	11.4%
Transport & Travel	5.4%
Unemployment Rate	11.4%
Labour Force Participation Rate	5.4%

Formal vs informal employment

EMPLOYMENT TYPE	SHARE OF WORKFORCE (%)	NOTES
Formal Employment	16%	Includes salaried, EPFO-covered, contract-based jobs
Informal Employment	84%	Includes self-employed, casual labour, unpaid household work
Self-Employed	57.3%	Dominant in agriculture and MSMEs
Casual Labourers	21.8%	Often seasonal, low-wage, unregulated
Unpaid Household Workers	18.3%	Mostly women, not counted in GDP
Regular Wage/Salaried	20.9%	Mostly urban, formal sector

Academia-industry partnerships & innovation drivers

Rapid industrialization brings india to the forefront of innovation

Academia and industry are no longer separate ecosystems but complementary engines of national progress. From the founding of premier institutes like the IITs, IISc, and IIMs in the post-independence era to today's AI-driven learning ecosystems, India's education system has evolved in lockstep with industrial growth.

Each phase of industrialization, from heavy engineering in the 1950s to digital transformation in the 2020s, has reshaped how knowledge is created, shared, and applied.

This co-evolution continues today as universities and corporations jointly build the competencies that define the **"Future of Work."**

The result is a dynamic model of learning through doing, where higher education institutions function as live innovation labs and companies act as catalysts for curriculum modernization, entrepreneurship, and applied research.

Landmark collaborations driving future-ready talent

India's top academic institutions are increasingly forging partnerships that fuse academic rigor with practical industry needs. These collaborations emphasize domain expertise, digital skills, and problem-solving agility.

PARTNERSHIP	FOCUS AREA	IMPACT & OUTCOME
Mahindra & Mahindra IIT Madras	Online M.Tech for working engineers; embedded mentorship; IP transfer	Strengthens technical leadership and industry-linked learning pathways
Deep Tech Labs @BITS Pilani	AI, Blockchain, Green Tech micro-credentials	Co-designed curricula producing job-ready graduates in frontier technologies
AIIMS/JIPMER/ Apollo	Med-Tech innovation, bio-research, clinical trials	Accelerates health-tech R&D and medical data innovation
Amity University	Future-of-Work labs, entrepreneurial projects	Nurtures startup culture, creating career agility among graduates

These models demonstrate a decisive shift from degree-based education to competency-based, industry-integrated learning, where employability outcomes are measurable and directly aligned with market demand.

Emerging practices & innovation ecosystem

Several leading universities now offer **micro-credentials, stackable degrees, and hybrid learning modules,** allowing learners to build modular expertise aligned with global standards.

Collaborative research programs are tackling India's most pressing challenges — from **climate adaptation and agricultural innovation** to **logistics optimization and pharmaceutical R&D.**

The **National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF)** highlights institutions like **IIT Madras, IISc Bengaluru, IIT Hyderabad, and BITS Pilani** as leaders in academic innovation, supported by new centers of excellence in **AI, clean energy, sustainable materials, and biotechnology.**

This interconnected ecosystem is not just serving Indian industries, as this shift is positioning India as a **global supplier of digital and technical talent.**

Historical continuum: from foundational reforms to future readiness

India's academic–industrial synergy has deep roots in its policy architecture. The **Scientific Policy Resolution (1958)** laid the groundwork for R&D-oriented higher education. The **Technology Policy Statement (1983)** and subsequent establishment of **DST, DBT, and AICTE** fostered innovation-led teaching.

Fast-forward to the 21st century, and this legacy continues under the **National Education Policy (NEP 2020),** an opportunity to integrate experiential learning, research, and innovation across all levels of education. NEP's emphasis on multidisciplinary learning, digital literacy, and global mobility is mirrored in national initiatives such as:

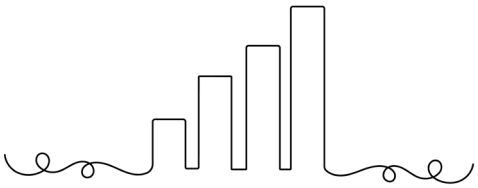
- **Digital India** and **Skill India,** linking education with employability.
- **SOAR (Skilling for AI Readiness)**, equipping youth and educators with AI and data capabilities.
- **National Research Foundation (NRF)**, funding interdisciplinary research and academia–industry consortia.

Opportunities & pathways for the next decade

India now stands at a strategic inflection point, where its young workforce, institutional capacity, and industrial ambition can converge to define the next global skills frontier. Key growth opportunities include:

- **Green technology & ESG innovation:** Academic R&D driving sustainable manufacturing and clean energy entrepreneurship.
- **Healthcare & life sciences:** Cross-sector collaboration for med-tech devices, AI diagnostics, and biotech startups.
- **Digital transformation in manufacturing:** Industry 4.0 partnerships focusing on automation, IoT, and robotics.
- **Agritech & food security:** Precision agriculture and biotech integration to secure livelihoods and climate resilience.
- **Creative Industries and Media:** Ed-tech and digital design labs empowering the next generation of content creators, engineers, and businessmen.

India's academia–industry partnerships are evolving beyond transactional relationships into ecosystems of mutual growth and national innovation. The bridges built between lecture halls and laboratories, startups and classrooms, are turning knowledge into economic value, and education into empowerment.



Sector-specific opportunities, talent trends & individual contributors

AI & automation in India – 2026 Snapshot

METRIC	STATISTICS
Market Size (India)	$5.1 billion in 2025, projected to reach $45 billion by 2031
Global Market Size	$757.58 billion in 2025, projected to reach $3.68 trillion by 2034
Job Posting Surge (India)	11.7% increase in AI-related job postings (Sept 2025)
Jobs Impacted by 2030	38 million jobs to be transformed by Generative AI

INDUSTRY/FIELD	EMERGING INNOVATION/OPPORTUNITY	NOTABLE CONTRIBUTORS/PROGRAMS
Green Tech/ESG	Solar, wind, battery, waste management, SDG-aligned research	ISRO, ReNew Power, IIM Ahmedabad's ESG Centre
Manufacturing & Industry 4.0	Robotics, automation, smart plants, digital twins	IIT Madras Centre for Smart Manuf., Siemens Tech
AgriTech	Farm analytics, precision fertigation, biotech innovation	TNAU, ICAR-Krishi Vigyan, BharatAgri, DeHaat
Finance & FinTech	AI-led credit, blockchain, digital banking	NIMC, ICICI, Razorpay, Paytm, NPCI
Healthcare, Biotech	Telehealth, bioinformatics, med-device innovation	MedGenome, Biocon Academy, HealthifyMe, Practo
Entertainment & Creative	Streaming, gaming, global digital media, AR/VR	Saregama, T-Series, Dream11, Nazara Tech

Defining the future: policy, ecosystems & the new innovation order

India's rise as an innovation powerhouse is underpinned by a deliberate convergence of **policy, education, and entrepreneurship**- a model where national vision and private ingenuity work in tandem.

- **Policy as catalyst:** Initiatives like **IN-SPACe, Drone Rules 2025, PLI schemes,** and **FAME-II** are fueling indigenous R&D, startup formation, and advanced manufacturing.
- **Education as foundation:** Institutions such as **IIT Madras, IISc Bengaluru,** and **BITS Pilani** are not only nurturing scientific talent but directly collaborating with industry through innovation labs and accelerator programs.
- **Entrepreneurship as engine:** India's **150,000+ start-ups,** backed by global investors and domestic policy support, now represent one of the most vibrant innovation ecosystems worldwide.
- **Public–private convergence:** Clusters like **iCreate, T-Hub,** and **Atal Innovation Mission** serve as bridges between government initiatives and emerging enterprises.
- **Sustainability & deep tech:** India's innovation trajectory now intertwines with climate goals — from **solar alliances powering AI data centers** to **EV adoption and smart manufacturing.**

Key takeaways & innovation map

India's policy, industrial, and academic effort is mutually reinforcing, deepening workforce skill, sectoral range, and innovation capacity for the Future of Work, both at home and in the global marketplace.

The global opportunity ahead

India's workforce transformation is no longer confined within its borders, but shaping the world's future of work one innovation at a time. With a youthful demographic dividend and an expanding digital economy, India is supplying the global market with talent that's both adaptive and future-ready. The rise of AI, automation, and remote collaboration has redefined employability, and India has positioned itself as the **world's digital workforce hub,** capable of meeting global demand with scale, skill, and innovation.

Over the past decade, policy-driven reforms like the **National Education Policy (NEP 2020), Skill India, and Digital India** have built a foundation for lifelong learning. These frameworks encourage micro-credentialing, digital literacy, and cross-border employability, enabling millions of professionals to work seamlessly with global enterprises. Indian universities and corporations now partner with global technology giants and international consortia to align training with the **AI-augmented economy,** preparing professionals for roles in data science, fintech, green energy, and advanced healthcare.

This transformation extends across all layers of the workforce. Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities have emerged as centers of innovation and entrepreneurship, powered by digital infrastructure and flexible work ecosystems. India's **gig and freelance economy,** now employing tens of millions, is fast integrating into global value chains, providing services in IT, design, education, and analytics to clients worldwide. The country's growing footprint in **software exports, digital consulting, and green manufacturing** reflects how its homegrown talent has become the backbone of multinational digital operations.

Globally, India's edge lies not just in numbers, but in **agility and diversity of skill.** Engineers, designers, healthcare professionals, and educators are contributing to sectors spanning the U.S., Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. Indian-origin researchers and innovators continue to lead in AI, sustainability, and biotechnology, strengthening the country's soft power in science and innovation diplomacy.

At the heart of this progress is a collective vision, one that values learning, adaptability, and inclusivity. The ability to **learn, unlearn, and relearn** is now India's most valuable export. As industries evolve and AI reshapes the meaning of work, India's workforce exemplifies how technology, when guided by purpose and policy, can elevate human potential.

India's journey from skill development to skill leadership represents more than economic progress, it is a social and intellectual revolution. As the world seeks adaptable, ethical, and digitally fluent professionals, **India's talent is not just participating in the global workforce but is defining the future of work.**

Policies & recommendations for future of work models

A learning India: policy, enterprise, & people

Positioning India for the global skills era

India's leadership in the global skills era emerges from its hybrid operating models, rapid digital adoption, changing leadership/employee relations, and bold policy interventions, from teachers' empowerment to platformization. The new world of work relies on collaboration, flexibility, fairness, and the dynamic human intelligence that adapts, mentors, and invents. The nation's trajectory toward becoming a global skills powerhouse rests on **innovation ecosystems that unite academia, industry, and government.** The sectors of tomorrow, AI, climate tech, biotech, fintech, and digital media, are being built today by a workforce that values **creativity as much as capability.**

As the India Skills Report 2026 explores further, these insights reveal not just the **direction of employment,** but the **character of India's talent evolution,** a shift from job-seeking to value-creating, from automation anxiety to adaptive intelligence, and from economic growth to **sustainable human advancement.**

Shaping the next workforce revolution

An increasingly multidimensional workforce, spanning gig, AI-assisted, and entrepreneurial models is becoming a **blueprint for inclusive economic resilience.**

The future of work will depend on **balance:**

- Between **automation and empathy,**
- Between **flexibility and security,** and
- Between **innovation and inclusion.**

To sustain this growth, industry and policymakers must prioritize:

- **AI literacy and digital rights,** ensuring workers understand and control the technology they use.
- **Micro-skilling programs** for gig and remote workers to stay competitive.
- **Public-private partnerships** that create portable benefits, credit access, and long-term career pathways.

Why is the future of work now?

- Gig and freelance work is democratizing access to income, creativity, and employment for India's youth, women, and regional talent.
- AI, platformization, and government policy are expanding both high-tech and knowledge/creative sectors.
- Remote work, regional startup hubs, and flexible models are powering entrepreneurship and new economic growth.
- Industries from arts to tech, from healthcare to fintech, are leveraging these new models for more inclusive and resilient growth.

As we advance into the next decade, the **India Skills Report 2026** recognizes this movement as beyond an economic shift and as a **cultural redefinition of work itself.** India's workforce no longer has to wait for the future of work because **it is actively building the future in India, one gig, one skill, and one meaningful connection at a time.**

The modern workplace: evolving models, etiquette & business culture

Here, we explore modernization of operating models that are redefining the way jobs, society, economy and agency transitions into talent, AI, equity, opportunity and interconnected collaboration.

Shifts in operating models & workplace culture in India

DOMAIN	FORMAL SECTOR	INFORMAL SECTOR
Workforce Share	~20–25% of workforce; contributes ~70% of Gross Value Added (GVA)	~75–80% of workforce; contributes ~45–50% of GDP
Digital Tech Usage	Extensive: ERP, CRM, cloud, AI, e-KYC, DBT, UPI, GST compliance	Growing: UPI, WhatsApp Biz, e-payments, e-Shram, Aadhaar-linked services
Leadership Styles	Flatter, collaborative, feedback-driven; rise in women leaders, hybrid policies	Hierarchical, relationship based; evolving via micro enterprise & digital skilling
Work Etiquette	Structured schedules, hybrid work, wellness programs, performance reviews	Flexible hours,community based norms, multitasking, informal peer networks
Performance Focus	KPI-driven, analytics, project-based delivery, goal alignment	Trust-based, quality and timeliness, reputation-centric
Cultural Trends	Inclusion, mentorship, digital literacy, skilling, ESG awareness	Entrepreneurship, peer mentoring, mobile-first learning, community upskilling
Impactful Policy	GST, UPI, JAM trinity, labor codes, wage codes, Skill India, PM SHRI	GeM, MSME credit, e-Shram, DBT, gig worker protections, Digital ShramSetu

Recorded in 2024, UPI processed 17,221 crore transactions worth ₹246.8 lakh crore (≈ $3 trillion USD).

Further, ₹1,572 lakh crore (≈ $1.89 trillion USD) was processed digitally in just the first half of 2025.

Leading platform-led operating models

85% of all payment transactions by volume in H1 2025 were via UPI. UPI handled 10,637 crore transactions worth $1.62 trillion USD in H1 2025 alone.

But, UPI accounts for 85% of volume, but only 9% of value due to small-ticket nature.

INDUSTRY	POPULAR TECH/PLATFORM	PRODUCTIVITY IMPACT EXAMPLE
Finance	Microsoft Dynamics, UPI, Tally	Seamless compliance, cashless payroll, real-time analytics
Sales, Marketing	Salesforce, HubSpot, Zoho CRM	AI-driven sales pipelines, omnichannel tracking
Manufacturing	Snowflake, SAP, AWS, Siemens MindSphere	Predictive analytics, smart plant operations
Retail/ E-commerce	Paytm for Biz, Razorpay, Google Analytics, Azure	Instant settlement, sales tracking, demand forecasting
Healthcare	Practo, AI tools, CrelioHealth	Telemedicine, diagnostics, record management
Education	DIKSHA, Google EdTech, NISHTHA, Google Cloud	Digital classrooms, personalized learning, teacher upskilling
Logistics	Rivigo, Blackbuck, BigBasket, AWS, Azure	AI route optimization, digital supply chain

Tech enabled business innovation

While digitalization and formalization are increasing, the claim that 90%+ of new Gross Value Add (GVA) is formal and data-driven is not yet supported by official data.

The formal manufacturing share is rising due to Production Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes, GST compliance, and digital Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) adoption, but informal businesses still contribute significantly.

EXAMPLE	ACHIEVEMENT/ MODEL	KEY FACTORS & TECH ENABLERS
TCS 'Secure Borderless Workspaces'	25/25 hybrid model (25% at office, anytime/anywhere teams)	Digital workflows, robust cybersecurity
Zerodha	Lowest-cost broking, rapid scaling, permanent WFH	Digital onboarding, micro-motivation, employee
Paytm	UPI-driven digital economy, MSME inclusion	Cloud, AI compliance, digital lending
BYJU'S, Vedantu	Largest edtech platforms in Asia	Mobile-first, adaptive AI, continuous teacher training
HUL (Unilever)	Rural reach, micro-credit, supply chain digitization	Real-time analytics, micro-entrepreneur support
Microsoft, Salesforce, Google	AI-powered skilling and work solutions in India	Broad public-private impact on MSMEs, skills, analytics

Policy & social impact: teachers & educators

Empowering the Backbone of Learning

India's education system is undergoing a transformation, and teachers are at the heart of it. From compensation reforms to digital upskilling, 2025 marks a pivotal year for educator empowerment.

Teacher compensation

- **Madhya Pradesh 2025:** The state will implement the fourth-time pay scale for 1,50,000 government school teachers, costing an additional $14.1 million USD annually. This includes assistant, senior, primary and secondary teachers.
- **Union Budget 2025:** Prioritizes AI-driven upskilling, broadband for rural schools, and teacher training. A $60 million USD Centre of Excellence in AI for Education has been announced to support intelligent learning tools and adaptive assessments.

Capacity building

- India faces a shortfall of ~1 million teachers, with 7,50,000 vacancies at the elementary level alone. Rural areas are most affected, with 15–20% of schools operating with a single teacher.
- Initiatives like DIKSHA, NISHTHA, and the Integrated Teacher Education Programme (ITEP) are being scaled to address this gap. The National Professional Standards for Teachers (NPST) and National Mission for Mentoring (NMM) are also underway.
- **Investment estimate:** The Samagra Shiksha budget of $4.97 billion USD (2025–26) supports not just salaries but also infrastructure, digital content, and training, making it a holistic investment in education quality.

Empowerment & recognition

- **National teacher awards 2025:** 81 educators were honored by President Droupadi Murmu for innovation, inclusion, and mentorship. Awardees included rural innovators, digital educators, and entrepreneurship mentors.
- Teachers are increasingly recognized as nation-builders, with a shift from rote instruction to facilitation, character-building, and digital fluency.
- NEP 2020 and PM SHRI schools emphasize teacher autonomy, continuous professional development, and inclusive pedagogy.

Challenges to address

- **Contractual hiring:** Over 50% of teaching posts in some states are filled by para-teachers, undermining job security and quality.
- **Non-academic duties:** Teachers are often diverted to administrative tasks (e.g., census, elections), reducing instructional time.
- **Infrastructure gaps:** Despite digital initiatives, only 53.9% of schools have internet access; device penetration remains low.

Forging the path forward

- **Permanent recruitment:** States must prioritize filling sanctioned posts with qualified, full-time educators.
- **Digital inclusion:** Expand device access, broadband, and digital pedagogy training.
- **Recognition & mentorship:** Scale up awards, peer mentoring, and leadership pathways for educators.
- **Policy execution:** Ensure timely rollout of labor reforms, teacher standards, and AI integration in classrooms.

Synopsis of culture, etiquette & the multigenerational workforces

- *Gen Z and millennials ("youth-centric workforce") demand meaning, collaboration, regular feedback, and mental health support, especially in startups and innovation hubs.*
- *Hybrid/work-from-anywhere, flexible schedules, continuous upskilling, and inclusion are becoming cultural expectations.*
- *Startups and SMEs are pioneering flatter hierarchies, "open comms," and inclusive leadership, while legacy firms still trend hierarchical and output-driven ("pocketed evolution").*

Policy & business model successes

COUNTRY/ COMPANY	INNOVATION/ POLICY	IMPACT
Microsoft / Google India	AI skilling, cloud infrastructure, UPI integration	Microsoft investing $3B USD to train 10M Indians in AI; UPI now serves 504M users and 65M merchants, handling 20B+ transactions/month
Singapore (SkillsFuture)	National lifelong learning credits, micro-credentials	Model for India's micro-credential push; Singapore scaling stackable, industry-aligned courses across IHLs
Unilever, HUL, Dalmia	MSME digitization, rural entrepreneurship, regenerative farming	HUL's Shakti network supports 160,000+ women entrepreneurs; 5M+ rural MSMEs digitized; $5B+ GDP impact from rural formalization and supply chain integration
US/Europe EdTech + India	Teacher training via IITs, DIKSHA, SWAYAM, PM eVidya	DIKSHA reaches 275M+ users; SWAYAM has 30M+ enrolments; ~7M+ teachers engaged in digital/AI upskilling

*Over **60% of rural schools** still lack basic digital infrastructure. DIKSHA (Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing), India's national digital learning platform for teachers and students, offers multilingual content, QR-linked textbooks, and interactive modules, and has reached 275 million users across states and UTs.*

Learning, unlearning & relearning: fueling India's talent revolution

India's journey toward an **AI-first economy** is reshaping not just what people do, but how they think, learn, and collaborate. The country's formal and informal workforces, spanning tech parks, startups, farms, classrooms, and gig platforms, are adapting to constant change through an evolving cycle of **learning, unlearning, and relearning.**

From the rapid digitalization of the informal economy via **UPI, MSME digitization, and gig platforms,** to enterprise-level transformations powered by **AI, ERP, and cloud ecosystems,** every sector now relies on a culture of continuous learning. The Indian workplace is becoming more **flexible, hybrid, and inclusive,** while educators and policy makers are reimagining lifelong learning to keep pace with technological evolution.

Policy & corporate takeaways for AI-first skills

To sustain the current transformation brought about by increased AI adoption, both **governments and organizations** must create systems that reward adaptability, lifelong learning, and ethical innovation.

Public policy plays a vital role in shaping equitable access to digital tools, infrastructure, and essential services that uplift communities. By investing in robust digital public infrastructure and AI-first skilling, governments and corporations can foster adaptability, ethical innovation, and lifelong learning. Expanding platforms like UPI and WhatsApp Business to underserved regions, supporting hybrid work models, and empowering teachers with AI tools ensures inclusive growth. Public-private collaborations and data-driven governance can accelerate scalable solutions, while micro-credentials and NEP-aligned programmes prepare citizens for the future. Together, these efforts improve quality of life and build a resilient, future-ready India.

For policymakers:

- **Institutionalize lifelong learning:** Embed micro-credential systems across education and public-sector training.
- **Invest in teacher & trainer upskilling:** Strengthen the foundation of skill delivery by empowering educators with AI fluency.
- **Support responsible AI:** Incentivize green data centers and ethical AI innovation aligned with the **UN SDGs.**
- **Digitize informal work:** Expand access to digital payments, credit, and social protection for gig and MSME workers.

For corporates:

- **Embed learning loops:** Design workplaces that encourage continuous skill renewal, through internal academies and AI-learning tools.
- **Humanize technology:** Use AI for augmentation, not replacement, keeping empathy, judgment, and creativity central to decision-making.
- **Promote flexibility & inclusion:** Support hybrid models, equitable pay, and cross-generational collaboration.
- **Build public partnerships:** Co-invest in digital literacy and employability programs to strengthen the national talent pipeline.

The learning mindset of the knowledge economy

The future of work is not defined by how much technology can do, but by how much **humans can grow alongside it.** India's workforce is already proving that adaptability, curiosity, and resilience are its greatest strengths.

To thrive in this AI-first world, the mantra is simple: *learn deeply, unlearn swiftly, and relearn constantly.*

"One of the most important lessons I have learned is to believe in yourself."

Ratan Naval Tata (1937 - 2024)

This continuous cycle keeps India's talent more than employable, but indispensable to the future global economy. Because learning fuels self-belief, and a self-driven individual inspires progress in others.

Summary of Key Findings

India employability outlook 2026

Overview of major trends

- **Employability in India** has improved to **56.35%**, up from **54.81%** in **2025**, showing consistent progress in job readiness and skill adaptability.
- **Tier-2 and Tier-3** cities such as **Lucknow, Kochi, and Chandigarh** are emerging as strong employability hubs, narrowing the urban–rural skill gap.
- **Gender inclusion** reached a milestone this year — female employability at **54%** surpassed male employability **(51.5%)** for the first time, driven by hybrid work and digital skilling initiatives.
- **AI integration in hiring** has surged, with **70% of IT** and **50% of BFSI** organizations reporting full or partial AI adoption in recruitment.
- **Hiring intent** for FY 2026–27 stands at **40%**, a sharp rise from last year's 29%, supported by strong demand in **technology, BFSI, healthcare, and renewable energy sectors.**
- **Salary expectations** are shifting upward, with most candidates targeting the **$40,000–$60,000/year** bracket, reflecting confidence in market opportunities.
- **Permanent employment** still forms the backbone of India's workforce (72%), while **gig and third-party roles** have grown to **16%**, signaling a maturing flexible economy.

Year-on-year employability insights (2025 vs 2026)

- **Engineering (B.E./B.Tech)** graduates maintain strong employability at **70.15%** (↓ from 71.5%), reflecting stability in technical domains despite rising specialization demands.
- **MBA graduates** dropped slightly to **72.76%** (↓ from 78%), indicating an industry shift toward applied, cross-domain managerial expertise.
- **Commerce graduates** rose sharply to **62.81%** (↑ from 55%), reflecting BFSI and fintech hiring surges.
- **Science (61%)** and **Arts (55.55%)** graduates saw steady gains as digital transformation expanded interdisciplinary career options.
- **Vocational and technical education** recorded the strongest improvements, **ITI (45.95%)** and **Polytechnic (32.92%)** employability increased due to targeted government skilling and MSME partnerships.
- **Computer Science and IT engineers** remain the most employable at **80% and 78%**, driven by AI, data analytics, and automation-related roles.
- **Age-wise employability** remains steady, led by the **22–25 age group (75.7%)**, which continues to dominate entry-level hiring.
- **Internship preferences** remain robust, with **92.8%** of students seeking practical exposure, especially high in **Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu.**

The emerging skill landscape

- **Digital fluency and critical thinking** saw measurable growth — Maharashtra (68.23%) and Karnataka (54.83%) lead in skill adoption and performance.
- **AI and automation literacy** are now considered foundational skills across all professional disciplines.
- **STEM and data analytics** continue to top employability requirements, alongside business communication, problem-solving, and emotional intelligence.
- **AI-assisted recruitment and training platforms** are personalizing upskilling pathways, matching learners with job roles more effectively.
- **Hybrid work competencies:** adaptability, time management, and cross-border communication — are increasingly rated as essential by employers.
- Employers and institutions are converging through **micro-credentials, stackable certifications, and experiential learning models** that align directly with industry demand.

Gender, inclusion & diversity insights

In 2026, India's talent ecosystem reflects a **turning point in inclusion** and equitable growth. Women's employability rose sharply to **54%,** overtaking men (51.5%) for the first time in 5 years, underscoring the success of remote work, digital skilling, and inclusion policies under **Skill India, NCS, and NEP 2020.**

Tier-2 and Tier-3 regions, particularly **Uttar Pradesh, Kerala, and Telangana**, are reporting stronger female participation in BFSI, education, and healthcare sectors, where flexible employment models are taking root.

The **gendered industry preference data** also reflects diversification: women now show dominant interest in **Legal (96.4%) and Healthcare (85.95%)**, while men continue to prefer **Graphic Design (83.11%) and Engineering Design (64.67%)**. These patterns mirror broader global transitions where women are entering knowledge-intensive and leadership roles, and men are diversifying into creative and design-led industries.

On the employer side, inclusive hiring frameworks are strengthening. **BFSI and FMCG sectors** lead internal mobility (26–50%), promoting career progression through internal learning programs. **IT and Manufacturing** continue to bridge technical hiring gaps via external recruitment but are investing in **gender-balanced apprenticeships and AI mentorship platforms.**

Collectively, these shifts illustrate that **India's employability growth is increasingly equitable, skills-based, and digitally democratized** - aligning with global standards for inclusive workforce development and sustainable economic growth.

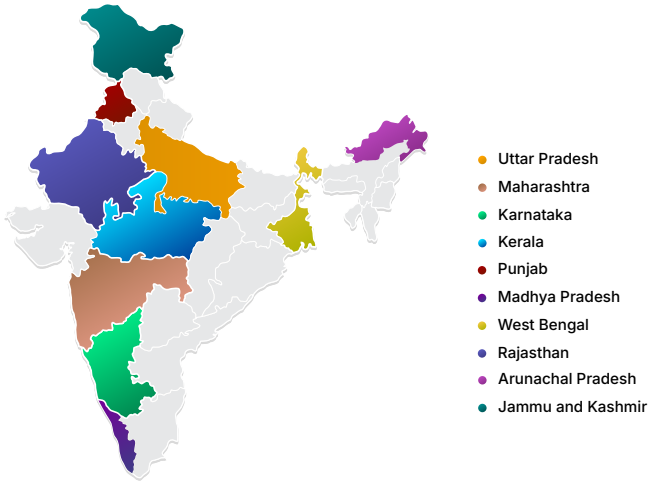
The Supply Story

Overview of employability trends for 2026

Overall employability

The overall employability across educational domains in India is **56.35%**, meaning more than half of the candidates scored above 60% on the GET. This is an improvement from last year's 54.81%, showing steady progress in job readiness.

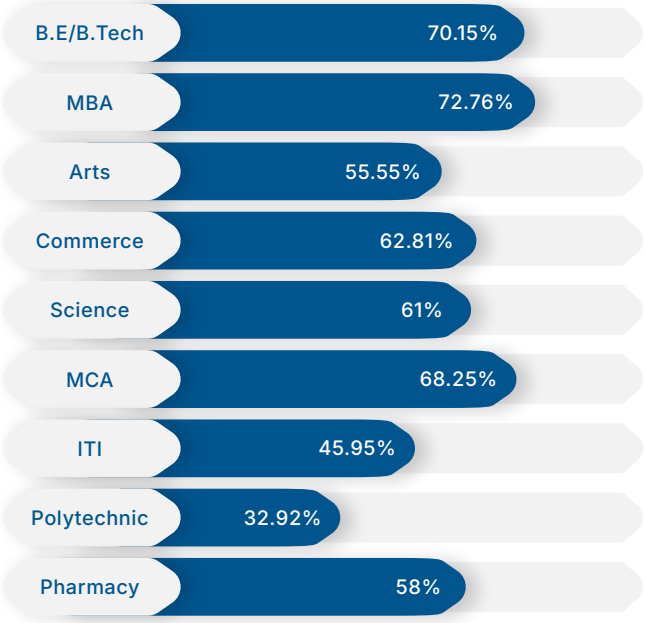
Top 10 states where users have scored more than 60% in G.E.T



Employability by educational qualification across age groups

- **Engineering graduates (B.E/B.Tech)** have an employability rate of **70.15%** across all age groups, slightly lower than last year but still the strongest group.
- **MBA graduates** stand at **72.76%**, down from 78%, indicating a need for advanced managerial skills.
- **Arts graduates** have an employability rate of **55.55%,** a small improvement over last year.
- **Commerce graduates** improved significantly to **62.81%,** reflecting growing demand in finance and business roles.
- **Science graduates** reached **61%**, up from 58%, showing better alignment with STEM careers.
- **MCA graduates** scored **68.25%**, slightly lower than last year but still strong for IT roles.
- **ITI candidates** jumped to **45.95%** from 41%, showing vocational skilling success.
- **Polytechnic diploma** holders improved to **32.92%,** indicating slow but positive growth.
- **Pharmacy graduates** reached **58%**, up from 56%, driven by healthcare sector expansion.

Employability by engineering specialization



- Computer Science graduates lead with **80% employability,** followed by Information Technology at **78%,** Instrumentation Engineering at **77%**, Electronics & Communication at **75%,** and Mechanical Engineering at **63%.**

Trend: Tech-focused specializations continue to dominate.

Top performing states by youth employability

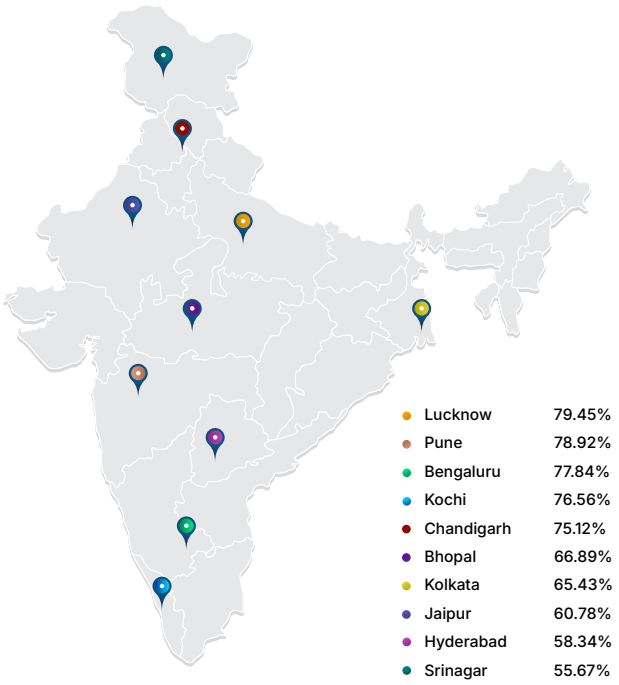
- Uttar Pradesh tops the list with **78.64%,** followed by Maharashtra **(75.42%),** Karnataka **(73.85%)**, Kerala **(72.16%)**, and Delhi **(71.25%)**.

Trend: Northern and Southern states maintain strong performance; Delhi and Telangana reappear in the rankings.

Top performing cities

- Lucknow leads with **79.45%,** followed by Pune **(78.92%),** Bengaluru **(77.84%),** Kochi **(76.56%),** and Chandigarh **(75.12%).**

Trend: Tier-2 cities like Lucknow and Kochi are emerging as strong talent hubs.



Skills availability

- Maharashtra shows the highest English proficiency at **68.23%**, followed by Punjab and Delhi.
- Critical thinking skills are strongest in Maharashtra **(68.23%)** and Uttar Pradesh **(67.89%).**
- Computer skills are highest in Karnataka **(54.83%)** and Uttar Pradesh **(47.56%).**

Trend: Language and tech skills remain concentrated in industrial and IT hubs.

Age-wise employability

- Candidates aged **22–25 years** are the most employable at **75.7%,** followed by 18–21 years **(71.38%)** and 26–29 years **(71.79%).**

Trend: The 22–25 age group continues to dominate, reflecting peak readiness for jobs.

Gender-wise employability

Internship preferences

- **92.8%** of candidates want internships, showing strong interest in practical experience.
- Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu lead in internship preference.

Trend: Internship demand remains high across all regions.

Access to technology

- **83.26%** of candidates have a computer at home, with Karnataka, Maharashtra, and Uttar Pradesh leading in ownership.

Trend: Digital access remains stable and widespread.

Salary expectations

- **38.27%** of candidates prefer a starting salary between $30,000–$40,000.
- **20.62%** prefer $40,000–$50,000, and 18.61% prefer $50,000–$60,000.

Trend: There is a clear shift toward higher salary brackets compared to last year.

Preferred work locations

- Karnataka, Maharashtra, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Delhi are the most preferred states for work.
- Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Pune, Mumbai, and Chennai are the top cities.

Trend: Southern and Western regions dominate job preferences.

Browser & email usage

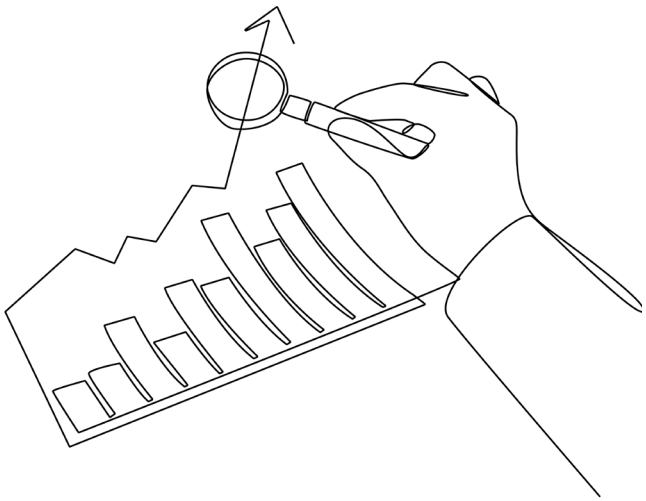
- **95.75%** of candidates used Chrome for assessments, and **87.78%** used Gmail IDs.

Trend: Chrome continues to dominate, and Gmail remains the primary email choice.

Global Employability Test (GET) analysis

- Male candidates prefer industries like Graphic Design **(83.11%)** and Engineering Design **(64.67%).**
- Female candidates show strong interest in Legal/Law **(96.4%)** and Healthcare **(85.95%).**
- Internship interest by age: 18–21 years **(95.16%),** 22–25 years **(94.28%),** 26–29 years **(87.71%).**

Trend: Gendered industry preferences are diversifying, and younger candidates remain highly internship-focused.



Academia Speaks

The India Skills Report is a strategic asset for curriculum planning. This year's focus on freelancing and AI-supplemented workforces is timely. The Global Employability Test has helped students discover their strengths and prepare for entrepreneurial roles.

Dr. Sanjeev Bansal
Addl. Pro Vice Chancellor, Dean FMS & Director ABS, Amity University, U.P.

"The India Skills Report and the Global Employability Test have helped to bridge the gap between academia and industry. The focus on AI and freelancing is what today's students need to thrive in the new gig economy and entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Prof. (Dr.) Ajeya Jha
Vice-Chancellor, Arunachal University of Studies, Namsai, Arunachal Pradesh

This year's theme resonates deeply with our entrepreneurial focus. The India Skills Report has helped us identify key gaps in freelancing and AI-readiness. The Global Employability Test empowers students to assess their relevance in a workforce increasingly shaped by gig roles and innovation.

Partha Pratim Lahiri
Registrar, Maulana Abul Kalam, Azad University, West Bengal

Our students have greatly benefited from the insights of the India Skills Report. With the rise of freelancing and AI-driven roles, the Global Em ployability Test has become a vital tool in our placement strategy, helping students prepare for diverse career paths including entrepreneurship.

Dr. Prasad R
Sr. Director, ICFAI Group

The India Skills Report continues to be a lighthouse for academic institutions. This year's theme is especially relevant as we prepare students for hybrid careers in freelancing, gig roles, and AI-driven industries. The Global Em ployability Test helps us tailor our training programs effectively.

Prof. (Dr.) Asaletha R
Principal, CUCEK, Cochin University of Science and Technology

The Global Employability Test has become an integral part of our student development initiatives. It offers a clear picture of where our students stand in a rapidly evolving job market. The India Skills Report complements this by helping us stay ahead of trends in freelancing, AI, and entrepreneurship.

Prof. S. Raisuddin
Dean (Academics) Jamia Hamdard University (D) New Delhi

The India Skills Report is an alarm bell for institutions still focused on tra- ditional career paths. With freelancing and Artificial Intelligence disrupting the existing hills and valleys, the Global Employability Test, has helped our students better acquire an entrepreneurial mindset.

Dr. Pramodh U Korula
Asst. Director - Corporate Relations, Rajagiri School of Management, MG University, Kochi

The Global Employability Test has helped our students understand the skills needed in a freelance and AI-driven world. The India Skills Report is a mirror reflecting the future of work in India—especially in the context of gig economy and entrepreneurial ventures.

Dr. Priestly Shan Boaz
Vice Chancellor, Alliance University

India hiring intent: early career edition 2026 The Demand Story

Overview of hiring trends for FY 2026-27

These insights are drawn from over 1,000 corporations across diverse industries, gathered through the Early Career Edition of the India Hiring Intent Survey 2026. This comprehensive survey offers a forward-looking perspective on talent demand as we step into FY 2026-27.

Demand for professionals across industries

Overall hiring momentum:

- Organizations project an average **40% of new positions** in FY 2026-27, representing a steady demand for fresh talent and signaling continued expansion, compared to last year's overall hiring intent increase of 29%.
- The replacement vs. new hire ratio shows that **60% of planned hires are replacement positions while 40% are new roles,** reflecting workforce optimization alongside growth strategies.

Experience mix evolution:

- **Freshers:** Demand for freshers has evolved strategically, with the IT sector leading at **35% of new hires from this bracket,** a substantial increase from the cross-industry average of **14% last year.**
- The Manufacturing sector continues its targeted approach with **just 5% fresher hires,** down from prior years, focusing instead on skilled experienced talent.
- **1-5 years experience:** This remains the most sought-after experience bracket, with **Pharmaceuticals & Healthcare leading at 65% of their new hires from this segment,** a notable increase from last year's 55.2% cross-industry average. **BFSI follows with 32%, while FMCG shows strong demand at 40%.**
- **6-10 years experience:** The Core & Infrastructure sector demonstrates the **highest demand at 60%** for professionals in this bracket, nearly double the cross industry average of 26% from last year. **Manufacturing** follows at **45%,** and **Automotive** at **35%**, all reflecting increased focus on mid-level expertise.
- **11-15 years experience:** Demand in this experience bracket shows nuanced sector priorities, with **FMCG** leading at **20%** and **Manufacturing at 15%**, indicating strategic investments in senior leadership and specialized knowledge.
- **15+ years experience:** Senior talent acquisition remains selective, with **FMCG at 12%** and **Automotive at 10%,** focused on executive and advisory roles.

Employment type distribution

Shift toward flexible workforce models:

- Permanent employment remains the backbone, averaging **72%** across sectors, with **BFSI and FMCG** both at **80%,** indicating stable long-term workforce strategies.
- **Third-party and gig workers** now represent **16%** of the workforce on average, with **Core & Infrastructure and Manufacturing** both at **25%**, reflecting a significant 16% share compared to the emerging gig trend noted previously.
- **Contractual roles** account for **7%** on average, with **IT at 15%** and **Pharmaceuticals & Healthcare at 25%,** showing project-based and specialized hiring strategies.
- **Apprentices and Interns** comprise **5%** of the workforce with **Automotive at 12%** and **Pharmaceuticals & Healthcare at 10%**, emphasizing talent pipeline development and skills training.

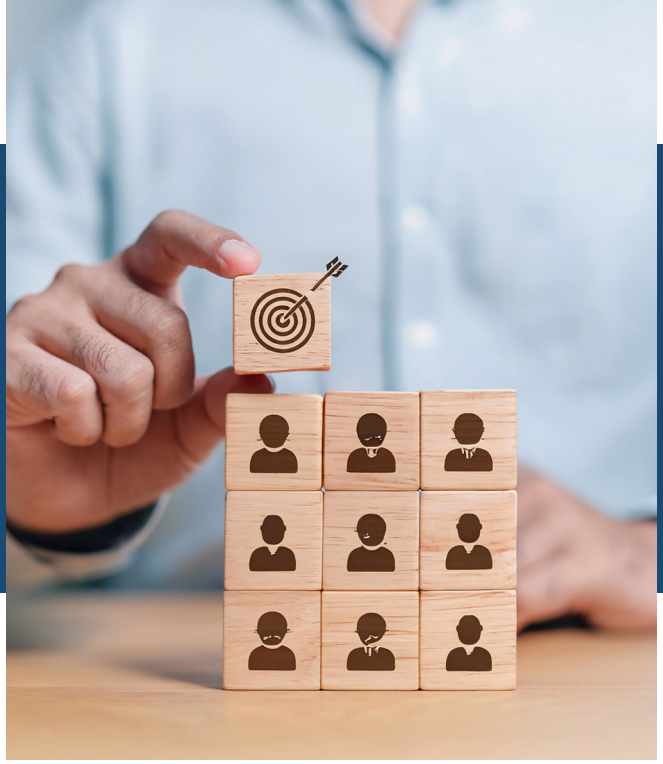
Use of AI for recruitment activities

AI adoption accelerates:

- AI adoption in recruitment has surged, with **70%** of **IT companies** reporting successful AI implementation and satisfaction, a substantial leap from last year's 38% cross-industry planning phase.
- **BFSI** leads in specific AI applications with **50%** implementation, particularly in interviewing and candidate screening, significantly higher than last year's early adoption signals.
- **45%** of Automotive and Manufacturing sectors are actively planning AI adoption, while **35%** of Automotive companies have already implemented AI solutions, showing momentum in traditionally manual hiring processes.
- Core & Infrastructure shows measured adoption at **25%** implementation, with **40%** planning to adopt, indicating a cautious but committed approach to AI-driven recruitment.

AI is increasingly used for conducting initial interviews (highest demand across industries), making hiring recommendations (67% in IT last year), and assessing candidate skills (50% in Manufacturing).

Internal hiring & employee retention



Internal hiring percentage (FY26-27)

High internal mobility sectors:

- **BFSI** leads at **26-50%** internal hiring, prioritizing career pathways within financial institutions and fostering employee retention. This upper-range performance reflects strong internal mobility programs and succession planning in the banking and fintech sectors.
- **Pharmaceuticals & healthcare** mirror BFSI at 26-50%, indicating robust internal skilling and career advancement programs that leverage existing talent for specialized roles, particularly critical in research, clinical, and operational management positions.

Balanced internal hiring:

- **Automotive, Core & Infrastructure, IT, and Manufacturing** all operate in the 10-25% range, reflecting a strategic balance between internal promotion and external talent acquisition. This moderate range suggests these sectors are selective in promoting internally while remaining open to specialized external expertise and fresh perspectives.
- This balanced approach allows organizations to maintain competitive advantage by importing specialized skills (particularly in advanced manufacturing, cloud infrastructure, and automotive electrification) while building internal leadership pipelines.

Mid-range internal development:

FMCG stands alone at **30-40%** internal hiring, reflecting strong emphasis on employee development, consumer-facing role progression, and brand loyalty. FMCG's higher internal hiring rate indicates well-established training pipelines and clear career advancement pathways, critical in competitive consumer markets where brand knowledge and company culture alignment drive performance.

Strategic insight

Internal hiring rates vary by industry need, as sectors requiring specialized technical expertise (IT, Manufacturing, Core Infrastructure at 10-25%) maintain lower internal mobility, while people-intensive sectors (FMCG, BFSI, Healthcare at 26-50%) invest heavily in internal career progression. This reflects a hybrid talent strategy, leveraging external expertise for innovation while retaining and advancing core organizational talent.

Industry-wise hiring intent across regions

Tier-wise talent distribution

Automotive

- 45% of hiring focused on Tier 1 cities, down from last year's 83%, indicating strategic geographic diversification.
- 35% in Tier 2 cities (previously 67%), including Indore, Pune, and Coimbatore, reflecting sustained mid-tier city growth.
- 20% in Tier 3 cities (up from 17%), such as Surat, Mysore, and Trichy, showing increased regional penetration.

BFSI

- 60% focus on Tier 1 cities (up from 50%), reinforcing metro dominance while maintaining balanced tier strategy.
- 30% in Tier 2 cities (down from 75%), including Chandigarh, Kochi, and Jaipur.
- 10% in Tier 3 cities (down from 38%), such as Nashik, Mangalore, and Visakhapatnam.

Information Technology (IT)

- 65% in Tier 1 cities (down from 70%), maintaining tech hub concentration.
- 25% in Tier 2 cities (down from 60%), such as Coimbatore, Indore, and Kochi.
- 10% in Tier 3 cities (down from 30%), like Mysore, Visakhapatnam, and Mangalore.

Manufacturing

- 35% in Tier 1 cities (down from 50%), reflecting decentralization strategies.
- 35% in Tier 2 cities (up from 33%), like Jaipur and Coimbatore.
- 30% in Tier 3 cities (up from 50% previously for Tier 3 alone), such as Trichy, Surat, and Nashik, demonstrating balanced regional hiring.

Pharmaceuticals & Healthcare

- 55% in Tier 1 cities (down from 70%), with continued metro focus.
- 30% in Tier 2 cities (up from 25%), such as Kochi and Indore.
- 15% in Tier 3 cities (up from 5%), like Mangalore and Mysore, indicating moderate expansion into smaller urban markets.

FMCG

- Demand for talent is 50% in Tier 1 cities (down from 100%), with 30% in Tier 2 and 20% in Tier 3, showing more balanced distribution across all tiers.

Work model distribution

Hybrid & remote work evolution

- FMCG and Pharmaceuticals & Healthcare remain predominantly onsite at 90% and 85% respectively, due to operational requirements.
- BFSI leads hybrid adoption at 50%, with 40% onsite and 10% remote, reflecting flexibility in financial services.
- IT shows a balanced approach: 50% onsite, 35% hybrid, and 15% remote, demonstrating the sector's flexibility leadership.
- Manufacturing and Core & Infrastructure maintain 75% and 70% onsite respectively, with hybrid options growing to 22-25%.

Partners Speak

From the desk of the chairman

Prof. T. G. Sitharam
CHAIRMAN, AICTE

I am delighted to learn that the India Skills Report 2026 is being released with the theme "Gig Economy, Freelancing, AI-Supplemented Workforce, and Entrepreneurship in India." This timely theme reflects the evolving landscape of work, where flexibility, innovation and technology are shaping the future of employment and productivity.

At AICTE, we have been steadfast in our mission to equip India's youth with future-ready skills through various initiatives focused on employability, entrepreneurship and lifelong learning. Our collaboration with industry partners, startups and academia aims to bridge the skill gap and ensure that every student is prepared to thrive in the dynamic global economy.

Through different schemes and initiatives we are empowering students to gain hands-on experience and develop a mindset of innovation and self-reliance. Furthermore, our continuous efforts to integrate Artificial Intelligence, emerging technologies, and green skills into technical education ensure that India's talent pool remains at the forefront of global transformation.

The rise of the gig economy and freelancing culture signifies a shift from conventional job structures to opportunity-driven, skill-based engagement. This shift, when supported by AI and digital platforms, can unlock immense potential for inclusive growth and economic resilience.

I congratulate the team behind the India Skills Report 2026 for their continued efforts in mapping employability trends and providing valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and industry leaders. Together, let us continue to nurture a skilled, innovative, and entrepreneurial India that leads the world in the new age of work.

From the desk of Confederation of Indian Industry

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From the desk of the secretary general

Dr. Pankaj Mittal
SECRETARY GENERAL, AIU

The **Association of Indian Universities (AIU)** has been a cornerstone in advancing India's higher education ecosystem, linking academic excellence with employability, innovation, and global engagement. As a **knowledge partner** for the *India Skills Report 2026: The Future of Work – Gig Economy, Freelancing, AI-Supplemented Workforce & Entrepreneurship,* AIU continues to drive reforms that align higher education with the evolving demands of a technology-driven and globalized workforce. Of late, AIU has evolved into a dynamic facilitator of educational transformation—bridging policy and practice, promoting inclusion and innovation, and positioning Indian universities as global leaders in academic excellence and skill development. With membership now extending to **1,123** universities, including **20** international members, AIU continues to expand its global reach through academic delegations and partnerships in Vietnam, Taiwan, the UK, Australia, Canada, Spain, and the USA.

Policy advocacy & national reforms

For over a century, AIU has played a transformative role in policy advocacy and education reforms. It has hosted key deliberations shaping India's educational trajectory. Its publications such as *"Enroute to New Higher Education Policy"* and *"Implementing NEP 2020: A Roadmap"* became reference documents guiding universities in policy implementation and reform.

Internationalisation of Indian higher education

AIU is one of the India's leading agency to promote internationalisation of higher education. Through the **Indian Network for Internationalisation of Higher Education (INIHE),** established in 2021, it has enabled collaborations among Indian and foreign universities for joint degrees, faculty mobility, and research partnerships. It has signed **Global MoUs** with university associations across **Europe, Asia, ASEAN, Africa, the UK, Australia, and Latin America.** It has organised **Education Summits** such as the ***Bharat–Nepal Summit (2024), Namaste Vietnam Summit (2024), Bharat-Sri Lanka Higher Education Summit (2025)*** and is hosting ***Global University Associations Forum in India.*** AIU's initiatives have democratized international access, ensuring that even Tier-2 and Tier-3 universities participate in global academic engagement.

Digital transformation & capacity building

AIU has spearheaded digital education reforms and institutional capacity building; by establishing **Academic & Administrative Development Centres (AADCs)** in many universities, each mandated to conduct annual training programmes on digital governance, AI pedagogy, and academic leadership. **Faculty Development Programmes (FDPs):** Since 2022, over **229 FDPs** have trained more than **11,500 faculty and administrators** in emerging areas. These initiatives have catalyzed a national shift toward **technology-enabled, blended learning ecosystems** across Indian universities.

Promoting women's leadership in higher education

In its commitment to gender equity and leadership, AIU organises **National Conference of Women Vice Chancellors.** The **1st Conference (2023)** focused on ***"Promoting Women Leadership in Higher Education".*** The **2nd Conference (2025)** on ***"Women-led Development for Viksit Bharat".*** These conferences promote dialogue, collaboration, and recognition of women's leadership in higher education governance and policy.

Inclusion of UGC-recognized autonomous colleges

In line with **NEP 2020,** AIU has extended **Associate Membership** to UGC-recognized autonomous colleges. This inclusion empowers such institutions to engage with leading universities; participate in capacity-building initiatives; contribute to policy development; and strengthen their academic visibility and identity. This measure supports NEP's vision of transitioning from affiliation to autonomy, fostering innovation and excellence in higher education.

Research, quality & academic innovation

AIU functions as India's only dedicated higher education–focused research organization. Major contributions include; **commissioned research projects** on financing, autonomy, and digital education, **Anveshan Student Research Conventions** (since 2008), fostering student-led innovations addressing societal needs, Leadership in establishing **quality assurance frameworks,** contributing to NAAC's benchmarking for accreditation and distance learning.

Culture, sports & youth development

India achieved its best-ever performance at the *31st World University Games (Chengdu, 2023)* with **26 medals,** rising to **7th** position globally. Organized the *FISU World University Shooting Championship (New Delhi, 2024)* and *Bilateral University Cricket Series (India–Australia)* and coordinated athlete selection for the *4th Khelo India University Games (2024)* in North-East India with participation from **4,500+** athletes in **20** disciplines.

Over five lakh students participate annually in AIU's youth festivals, nurturing artists such as *Kapil Sharma, Divya Dutta, Sugandha Mishra, Ashutosh Rana, and Mahalakshmi Iyer.* In its centennial year, AIU facilitated international participation of UNIFEST winners in youth festivals in **Italy, Czech Republic, Hungary, Russia, Egypt, and China,** showcasing India's cultural soft power.

AIU today: role & mandate

Representing **over 1,123** universities and **20** international associate members, AIU stands among the world's largest inter-university networks. It serves as an **ex-officio member** of national and international statutory bodies including **AICTE, ICCR, FISU, and the Indian Olympic Association, a policy enabler and facilitator,** complementing the roles of UGC, AICTE, and NAAC, a **capacity-building hub,** conducting training and leadership development programmes for Vice Chancellors, Registrars, Deans, and Controllers of Examination.

AIU remains the **voice, bridge, and catalyst** for Indian universities linking national goals with global academic imperatives.

Over the past decade, AIU's contributions include:

- Leadership in **NEP 2020 formulation and implementation.**
- Creation of **INIHE** and global **MoUs** for internationalisation.
- Launch of **AADCs** and digital capacity-building initiatives.
- Promotion of **university sports** through Khelo India and World University Games.
- Advancement of **cultural diplomacy** via UNIFESTs.
- Strategic **financial and governance reforms** for HEIs.

As a partner in the **India Skills Report 2026,** AIU reaffirms its mission to integrate **education with employability, academic rigor with innovation,** and **local wisdom with global relevance.**

AIU's journey embodies a vision for a **digital, entrepreneurial, and AI-driven era,** positioning Indian universities as **architects of a globally competitive, human-centered future workforce.**

Our State Partners

Building a future ready Kerala

Dr. R. Bindu
THE MINISTER FOR HIGHER EDUCATION & SOCIAL JUSTICE, GOV. OF KERALA

Kerala is marching towards a dynamic, knowledge-based economy, and our Higher Education Department is committed to empowering our youth with the skills and agility to thrive. We are creating pathways for students to pursue their aspirations while meeting the evolving needs of industry.

Our state sets national benchmarks in inclusive education, with a Gross Enrolment Ratio of 41.3% and Indias highest Gender Parity Index (1.44). Academic excellence is demonstrated by our 16 State Universities and over 1,400 colleges, supported by a strong pupil-teacher ratio of 15:1. Kerala is a top performer on the national SDG-4 Index, home to over 400 NAAC-accredited institutions, with MGU and Calicut University gaining global recognition.

Digital reforms like K-REAP and KALNET have modernized the academic environment for transparency and accessibility. A key focus is bridging the gap between learning and employability. Initiatives like ASAP Kerala provide industry-relevant training through Community Skill Parks and online platforms. As an NCVET-recognised, ISO-certified body with an international recruitment licence, ASAP connects students to opportunities across India and soon, abroad.

Kerala's steady standing in the India Skills Report is a testament to the collaborative efforts of the government, industry, and our campuses. We will continue to strengthen this ecosystem, ensuring our youth remain the cornerstone of the nation's sustainable growth and innovation.

Additional Skill Acquisition Programme Kerala

What are the primary initiatives and programs your state has implemented to enhance workforce skills in emerging areas like AI, gig economy, freelancing, remote work, and entrepreneurship, and what outcomes have been observed so far?

Kerala has positioned itself as a national leader in future-oriented skilling through systematic interventions that integrate emerging technologies and new work models into mainstream education and training. The state's strategic approach encompasses both structural reforms and targeted initiatives to strengthen capabilities in **Artificial Intelligence (AI), digital technologies, freelancing, gig-based work,** and **entrepreneurship.**

The state has added more than 4,500 seats for AI courses across institutions, directly addressing industry demand for trained professionals in machine learning, data analytics, and automation. To complement this academic integration, the Government launched the **K-AI Initiative: AI for Governance,** encouraging innovators and startups to create AI-driven solutions for public service delivery, thus blending education with real-world problem-solving. Parallelly, Kerala's efforts to prepare its population for the evolving gig and freelance economy have resulted in the establishment of specialized skilling and digital employment programs.

Central to this ecosystem is **ASAP Kerala (Additional Skill Acquisition Programme), an ISO 21001:2018 certified PSU under the Department of Higher Education, Govt of Kerala,** which serves as the state's operational backbone for implementing large-scale skilling in emerging domains. ASAP Kerala's Centres of Excellence (CoEs) in **Electric Vehicles (EV)** and **Augmented and Virtual Reality (AR/VR)** —established within Community Skill Parks—act as micro innovation hubs that simulate industry environments. These centres provide R&D-linked, project-based learning that enables learners to transition smoothly into advanced tech roles or entrepreneurial ventures.

ASAP's **Vayanashala 2.0** initiative has trained learners for freelance and gig work in areas such as Cloud Operations,

No-Code Automation, and Digital Design. Each program blends 8–12 weeks of skill training with industry internships in leading MNCs, ensuring experiential exposure and employability.

Furthermore, through its International Recruitment License and partnerships with global entities, ASAP Kerala has expanded opportunities for international employment and skill recognition, directly contributing to Kerala's vision of becoming a global skill hub.

ASAP Kerala, through its dedicated placement and internship portal, has successfully facilitated placements and internships for candidates across various streams, including technical and non-technical domains, in reputed multinational organizations.

Collectively, these initiatives have ensured that Kerala not only keeps pace with but actively shapes the future of work, positioning its youth as adaptive, employable, and globally mobile.

How has your state adapted its skilling and education policies to meet the evolving nature of work (including shifts in work structures such as the rise of remote work, hybrid teams, automation, and digital transformation), and how has it integrated technology and flexible employment models like remote and hybrid work?

Kerala has adopted a progressive policy framework that integrates flexibility, technology, and inclusivity into its education and skilling ecosystem to align with the evolving nature of work characterized by automation, hybrid workplaces, and remote employment. The introduction of the **Four-Year Undergraduate Programme (FYUGP)** from 2024–25 represents a transformative step, allowing students to choose from multiple major-minor combinations, shift disciplines mid-course, and pursue either a research or employment-oriented track. This flexibility mirrors global higher education standards and prepares students for agile, technology-driven work environments.

With a Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of 41.3 and a Gender Parity Index (GPI) of 1.44—both significantly higher than the national average—Kerala demonstrates a unique readiness to adopt remote and hybrid work structures. To facilitate this transition, the state has invested heavily in digital infrastructure through **K-LEARN,** a unified e-learning ecosystem, and **K-REAP,** a cloud-based student lifecycle management system integrated with the **Academic Bank of Credits (ABC).** These systems enable lifelong learning, mobility of credits, and recognition of skills acquired through non-traditional means.

Supporting this digital transition, **ASAP Kerala** has been instrumental in operationalizing these policy shifts on the ground. Its strategic partnerships with industry leaders such as **Tata Power (Mananthavady)** and **Adani Ports (Vizhinjam)** have transformed Community Skill Parks into live learning environments where students train on industry-grade equipment and processes. These collaborations ensure that the workforce is not merely theoretically trained but is industry-ready to handle automation and digital transformation challenges.

Recognizing the high participation of women in higher education, ASAP Kerala has rolled out targeted **work readiness programs that provide digital literacy, communication, and project management skills to women transitioning to** hybrid or remote work. Further, specialized training programs in Digital Marketing, Data Analytics, and **Financial Technology** enable youth to participate in global virtual teams, freelance projects, and flexible work setups. Alumni outcomes indicate high employability in digital domains, reinforcing the success of Kerala's policy-driven, skill-integrated approach.

By combining smart policies and effective actions, Kerala has built a learning and job environment that focuses on flexibility, inclusion, and technology as the main parts of changing the workforce.

What challenges and opportunities does your state face in mapping local talent to future work models (including non-traditional frameworks like remote work, flexible hours, hybrid teams, and AI-driven workflows), and how is it facilitating global talent mobility, particularly to regions like Asia and the Middle East?

Kerala's strong human capital base, reflected in its high GER and literacy rates, provides a fertile ground for developing talent suited to global and non-traditional work frameworks. However, aligning the vast academic talent pool with rapidly evolving global work standards remains a key challenge. Recognizing this, the state launched the **Kerala Semiconductor Research & VLSI Design Initiative** to prepare a new generation of professionals for high-end, AI-driven hardware design and semiconductor engineering—an essential sector for the global digital economy.

At the core of implementing this future-ready workforce strategy is **ASAP Kerala,** which has emerged as the state's nodal agency for standardizing skill training, ensuring certification quality, and connecting Kerala's skilled population to international labour markets. ASAP Kerala's acquisition of an International Recruitment License has professionalized overseas recruitment, facilitating ethical and transparent migration pathways for skilled workers to regions like the Middle East, Europe, and Asia.

In addition, ASAP Kerala's leadership in organizing the *Global Mobility and Global Skill Partnerships* session during the Skill Kerala Global Summit 2025 underscores the

the state's proactive approach in aligning its talent pool with international standards..

ASAP Kerala's designation as a **Skill India International Network Centre** by NSDC-IISC has strengthened Kerala's credibility in the global skilling ecosystem. These recognitions ensure that Kerala-trained professionals hold certifications that are internationally valid, enabling smooth talent mobility.

Through these multifaceted interventions, Kerala has positioned itself not just as a talent supplier but as a *global skill destination,* capable of producing high-quality, mobile, and industry-relevant professionals.

The offering of Global Qualification Framework aligned skill training in the areas of Cybersecurity, Healthcare, Automotive and US Taxation are enabling Global talent mobility pathways not only to Asia and Middle East but to other nations such as Australia, US, UK and EU. These global qualification framework aligned skill training programs can be only curated through the skill gap competencies between host and destination countries.

What emerging skills are most in demand in your state's job market, and how are training institutions and academia responding to redefine skills for the future economy?

Kerala's evolving job market demonstrates a clear surge in demand for skills related to **AI, Data Science, VLSI Design, Robotics, Cybersecurity, and Creative Technology.** These competencies are complemented by service-sector skills in healthcare, logistics, and financial services. The state's response has been comprehensive—integrating structural reforms in higher education, industry collaboration, and focused investments in research and innovation ecosystems.

The establishment of the **Digital Science Park** and the **Emerging Technology Hub** at Technocity, Thiruvananthapuram, symbolizes Kerala's commitment to developing a deep-tech and R&D-driven economy. Universities have launched specialized **Centres of Excellence in Neurodegeneration, Brain Health (Cochin University of Science and Technology),** and **Nanosciences (MG University),** creating academic pathways that directly connect research to industrial application.

ASAP Kerala plays a critical role in bridging this academic innovation with employable skill development. Its sector-specific programs, ranging from 100 to 240 hours of intensive training followed by internships, are aligned with current and emerging market requirements. Courses in healthcare (Dental Assistant), logistics (Inventory Clerk), and fintech (AI/IoT-enabled processes) demonstrate the integration of vocational and academic learning.

Additionally, ASAP Kerala nurtures entrepreneurship by training skilled individuals to join startups and run ventures. This linkage of training with enterprise creation not only enhances employability but also contributes to job creation within the local economy.

By combining high-end research infrastructure with hands-on vocational skilling, Kerala has created a dynamic skills pipeline that supports both innovation and inclusion, preparing its youth for the rapidly transforming economic landscape.

How does your state contribute to advancing human progress through skilling, and what recommendations do you have for national-level alignment with future of work drivers?

Kerala's approach to advancing human progress through skilling is built on three pillars: quality education, inclusivity, and innovation. The state's excellence in higher education—with four institutions in the NIRF Overall Top 100 and 18 in the Top 100 Colleges—reflects a robust academic foundation that feeds into its skilling ecosystem.

By integrating vocational modules, industry internships, credit banks, and global mobility pathways, the state has moved from simply creating jobs to building capabilities for lifelong learning and global participation.

Within this inclusive framework, **ASAP Kerala** serves as a model of socially responsive skilling. Its programs for mothers of intellectually challenged children—training over 1,000 participants in artisanal baking—and for women under Dharppanam exemplify skilling as a tool for empowerment. The recently launched Naree Chakra programme, developed with the support of Mahindra & Mahindra, aims to train and place women in the Automotive sales sector. By integrating these interventions into the broader skilling ecosystem, Kerala ensures that human development is holistic and inclusive.

ASAP Kerala's Centres of Excellence and mandatory internship-linked training models have also established a benchmark for industry-led, quality-assured skilling. ASAP ensures uniformity in training standards, assessment, and certification, thus reinforcing Kerala's leadership in outcome-driven skilling.

Given these achievements, the Kerala model offers clear lessons for national skilling strategy: embed skilling within a human-progress framework (not just employment), ensure that skilling is inclusive and quality-driven, integrate global standards and mobility pathways, and use data-driven talent mapping to align supply with future demand. In doing so, states and the national government can move from volume-based skilling to outcome-based capability building.

Jammu & Kashmir

Shahzad Alam, IAS

DIRECTOR (EMPLOYMENT),
DIRECTOR SKILL DEVELOPMENT
JAMMU AND KASHMIR &
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, MISSION YOUTH
AND MISSION DIRECTOR, MISSION YUVA.

Mission YUVA is the Union Territory's structured entrepreneurship and livelihood initiative designed to convert youth from job-seeking to self-employment and enterprise creation. The Mission adopts a four-pillar architecture — Culture (entrepreneurial mindset), Capital (credit and subsidy), Capacity (skills and business readiness), and Connectivity (digital and market linkage) — with a five-year target of engaging five lakh identified potential entrepreneurs and enabling over 1.37 lakh new enterprises with associated employment outcomes.

A technology-enabled baseline survey, conducted through 17,000 field investigators using a BISAG-developed mobile application, covered 23.64 lakh households (1.1 crore individuals). The survey identified five lakh potential entrepreneurs and captured information on skills, enterprise readiness, financial barriers and market gaps. The generated dataset has cross-departmental analytical value for schemes associated with social protection, skill development, dropout tracing, and livelihood policy convergence.

Institutional support has been operationalised through Small Business Development Units at district level, Business Help Desks at sub-division level, and a YUVA-Doot outreach cadre ensuring follow-up and documentation support. Technology integration includes AI-based DPR tools, a digital processing pipeline

Programme outreach has included over 5,000 mobilisation and awareness events, covering more than two lakh youth, 40,000 women in Self-Help Groups and 20,000 college students. Pipeline development has translated into measurable application inflow.

As per the live dashboard 126,376 individuals have registered, 54,161 have initiated applications, and 51,413 have completed submission. Downstream processing shows 33,882 Detailed Project report prepared and verified by Small Business development Unit SBDU. At the approval and finance stage, 29,380 applications have received District Level Implementation Committee (DLIC) approval, 7,945 have achieved bank sanction and 4,947 have reached disbursal. A total of Project worth Rs 600 crores have been sanctioned and Rs 275 crores have been disbursed. First tranche subsidy release is reflected for 259 cases; second tranche release is yet to commence.

Dashboard composition indicates a predominantly rural beneficiary base (40,748 rural vs. 10,520 urban applications) and the inclusion of 3,377 specially-abled applicants.14,000 users on the skill-learning platform (5,000 course completions), hybrid entrepreneurship training for 1,500 candidates, and ONDC-based e-commerce linkage for market access.

The Mission demonstrates a functioning credit-to-enterprise funnel with strong entry and verification throughput, and a growing sanction-to-disbursal stream. Immediate improvement opportunities relate to pendency reduction (BHD/SBDU), documentation support for sanction acceleration, and activation of post-disbursal support (subsidy timing, aftercare, and market linkage) to strengthen enterprise durability and employment outcomes.

Building a future-ready workforce for a $1 trillion economy Karnataka

Dr. E V Ramana Reddy IAS(R)
CHAIRMAN,
KARNATAKA SKILL DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY, GOV. OF KARNATAKA

Karnataka has long been recognised as India's innovation powerhouse, where technology, entrepreneurship, and education seamlessly converge. Contributing over eight percent to the national GDP, the State has leveraged its economic dynamism to craft a robust human capital strategy, positioning itself to realise the vision of becoming a $1 trillion economy by 2032.

At the heart of this transformation lies the Government of Karnataka's unwavering focus on skilling and employability, guided by the **Karnataka State Skill Development Policy 2025–2032,** a strategic blueprint to build a globally competitive, inclusive, and future-ready workforce through sustained investment, industry collaboration, and innovation. Through the Department of Skill Development, Entrepreneurship and Livelihood (SDEL), Karnataka has built one of India's most comprehensive skill ecosystems, combining modern infrastructure, strong industry linkages, and a global outlook to prepare youth for the jobs of tomorrow.

A strong foundation: schemes that empower

Over the past decade, Karnataka has evolved from traditional vocational training to an integrated, technology-driven skilling framework. The State's network of Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs), Government Tool Room and Training Centres (GTTCs), and Karnataka German Technical Training Institutes (KGTTIs) anchor this transformation.

Flagship schemes such as the Chief Minister's Kaushalya Karnataka Yojane (CMKKY), UDYOGA, and Kalike Jothege Kaushalya have enabled lakhs of youth to acquire market-relevant skills across sectors ranging from manufacturing to IT, healthcare, and construction. Initiatives like Nanna Vrutti Nanna Ayke provide career guidance to students, while Yuvanidhi offers financial and skilling support to unemployed youth during their job search period.

The Industry Linkage Cell (ILC) has strengthened ties between training institutions and enterprises, ensuring that curricula reflect real-world demands. For those outside formal education, Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) programmes under CMKKY are formalising skills of artisans and gig-economy workers, linking them with certification and livelihoods.

Karnataka's excellence is also reflected in the IndiaSkills and WorldSkills platforms, where its candidates have consistently ranked among the best in the country, securing the second position in 2024 in the national medal tally and demonstrating the State's strong commitment to quality and competitiveness.

From skill to employment & enterprise

SDEL's guiding philosophy is simple: every skill must translate into opportunity. Employment exchanges and District Skill Committees have been rejuvenated to organise job fairs, apprenticeships, and dual-training models in collaboration with industry. The State's Centre for Entrepreneurship Development of Karnataka (CEDOK) nurtures entrepreneurial aspirations through training, incubation, and financial linkages, ensuring that skilling is not limited to wage employment but extends to enterprise creation.

This approach is reinforced by digital tools like the Karnataka Skill Connect Portal (KSCP), which bridges trained candidates with employers and provides real-time access to career opportunities across the State.

Technology, talent & tomorrow

Karnataka's new State Skill Development Policy 2025-2032 provides the strategic roadmap for the next phase of growth. It envisions skilling three million youth through a system that is inclusive, data-driven, and globally benchmarked.

The policy places a strong emphasis on emerging technologies like Artificial Intelligence, Robotics, Green Energy, and Industry 4.0, ensuring that technical institutions remain aligned with evolving industry needs. Under the Future Skills initiative, the State partners with leading technology firms and academic institutions to deliver advanced, hands-on training in new-age domains.

In parallel, Karnataka is investing in trainer capacity building through its Institutes for Training of Trainers (iToTs), ensuring that faculty are equipped to deliver high-quality learning. The upcoming Karnataka Skill Intelligence & Strategy Unit (KSISU) will further use data analytics to align training supply with labour-market demand.

Global aspirations & inclusive growth

Recognising the growing demand for skilled Indian workers abroad, SDEL established the International Migration Centre Karnataka (IMC-K) to facilitate safe and informed overseas employment. Through upcoming regional Migration Resource Centres, candidates will receive language, technical, and cultural orientation aligned with destination country requirements, positioning Karnataka as a key contributor to global talent mobility.

At home, inclusivity will continue to remain a central tenet of Karnataka's skilling agenda. The Department plans to expand opportunities for women, rural youth, and persons with disabilities through targeted scholarships, hostel facilities, and community outreach initiatives. Upcoming artisanal skill programmes will focus on revitalising traditional crafts such as Channapatna toys, Bidriware, and Ilkal sarees, connecting Karnataka's rich heritage with modern markets and sustainable livelihoods.

Vision ahead: skilling for a trillion-dollar economy

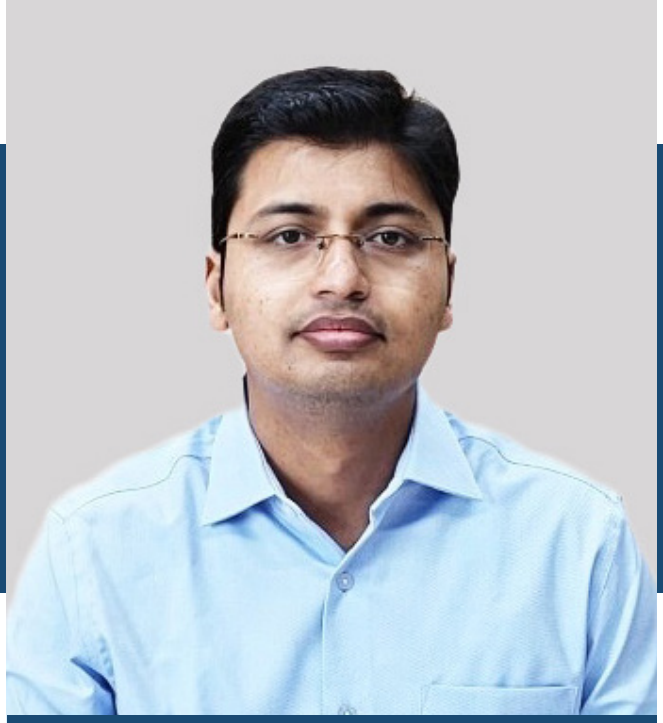
As Karnataka advances toward its vision of a $1 trillion economy by 2032, the Department of Skill Development, Entrepreneurship and Livelihood envisions a lifelong learning ecosystem that adapts continuously to economic and technological shifts.

Future priorities include:

- Scaling CMKKY 2.0 as an umbrella framework for all skilling initiatives;
- Deepening industry partnerships for apprenticeships and dual training;
- Expanding green and digital skill programmes;
- Integrating vocational education within schools and universities; and
- Building a robust system of trainer development and performance tracking.

By aligning education, employability, and entrepreneurship, Karnataka aims not only to strengthen its own workforce but to emerge as a global benchmark for skill excellence: a State where every youth has the opportunity, capability, and confidence to contribute to India's growth story.

Preparing a generation to shape the future Tamil Nadu



Kranthi Kumar Pati, IAS
THE MANAGING DIRECTOR OF
THE TAMIL NADU SKILL DEVELOPMENT
CORPORATION (TNSDC)

Tamil Nadu stands at a remarkable point in its evolution as a society. The world is changing faster than at any moment in human history: artificial intelligence is reshaping decision-making, automation is reimagining production, electric and green mobility are redefining transport, and knowledge is no longer bound by physical geography. The very meaning of work is transforming - careers are becoming fluid, learning is becoming lifelong, and value is increasingly created through ideas, creativity, and collaboration. In such a world, the strength of a region is not measured by the resources it owns, but by the dreams, skills, and confidence of its people. Tamil Nadu has recognized this truth early, and with foresight and courage, has chosen to invest in its young people as the architects of tomorrow.

The State's approach to **preparing a future-ready workforce** is not rooted in fear of disruption, but in the conviction that change is an opportunity. Tamil Nadu's youth are seen as key drivers who will shape the future economy, not just take part in it. To enable this, the State has undertaken a long-term transformation of its skilling ecosystem, not as a standalone intervention but as a cultural reorientation. Talent is being nurtured not only through training, but through mindset-building, identity formation, global exposure, and empowerment.

The State's skilling architecture is anchored by the **Tamil Nadu Skill Development Corporation (TNSDC)** under the Special Programme Implementation Department, Govt. of Tamil Nadu ensuring convergence, inclusion, and industry alignment.

Skilling in school education: career guidance & mentoring

Naan Mudhalvan - Uyarvukku Padi (meaning **"Smooth Transition Post Schooling"**) scheme aims to **reverse the trend of youth dropping** out after the 12th standard. For the year s 2023 and 2024, conducted special camp in phases has enabled 77,752 students who hadn't applied for higher education to enrol in colleges and technical institutions Such as ITI's and Polytechnics to pursue their higher education through counselling and guidance at the block level across the state ensuring the inclusion. The program was supported by various departments, including District Administration, School Education, Social Welfare, BC Welfare, AD Welfare, and Skill Development, Lead Banks and was effectively coordinated by the Tamil Nadu Skill Development Corporation (TNSDC).

Career readiness is bolstered through the **Naan Mudhalvan - Kalloori Kanavu** (Dream for College) – career guidance Programme), designed to help 12th standard students choose the right higher education path after completing school, in which 1.12 lakh students benefitted in 2024, taking their first step toward higher education and career planning.

Idea competition for school students: A platform to spark curiosity and creativity among school students by encouraging innovative, technology-driven solutions for everyday life. This initiative fosters problem-solving skills and a culture of innovation from a young age.

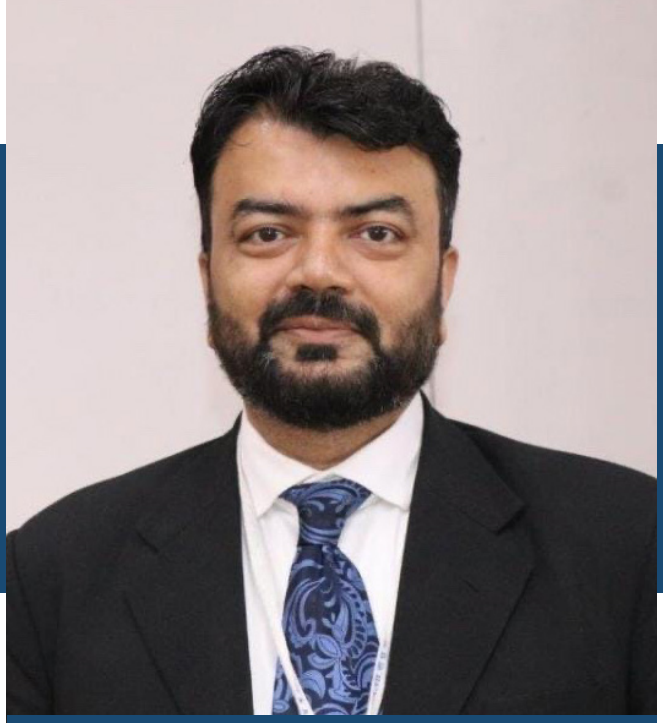
International collaborations for science competitions: Efforts are being undertaken to collaborate with international science centres for organizing science competitions for students. These initiatives aim to provide global exposure, foster knowledge exchange, and nurture a spirit of innovation. By enhancing the overall scientific temperament of students, such collaborations significantly contribute to the advancement of science and technology in India.

AI integrated into the school curriculum to build early exposure and digital readiness among students.

A generation that will lead

By mainstreaming emerging technology skills, transforming Government ITIs into Industry 4.0 Centres of Excellence, and enabling a CSR-led, industry-integrated skilling ecosystem at scale, Tamil Nadu has positioned itself as the national benchmark for future-ready talent development.The State is not merely producing skilled workers – it is cultivating a confident generation that knows its capability and worth. A generation that does not wait for opportunity but has the courage to create it. A generation that does not fear the future, but is prepared to imagine it, build it, and lead it. In doing so, Tamil Nadu is not only contributing to India's aspiration of becoming the Skill Capital of the World – it is shaping the very architects of its future.

Building the soft skills for tomorrow Bihar



Deepak Anand, IAS
CEO BIHAR SKILL DEVELOPMENT MISSION
CUM SECRETARY, LABOUR RESOURCES
DEPARTMENT, GOV. OF BIHAR

Bihar Kushal Yuva Program

The program became a bridge between education and employability, giving young people not just a certificate, but the confidence to face the job market or start their own small enterprise. To make this vision a reality, BSDM established a wide network of Kaushal Yuva Kendras (KYKs) across the state.Each center became a hub of hope equipped with computers, digital learning systems, and certified trainers. Learners from small villages to urban centers could walk in, learn, and grow.

In a vibrant initiative aimed at youth empowerment, **1,830 training institutes** were established across the region. This network included 1,141 KYP Skill Development Centers (SDCs), 501 KYP Block Skill Development Centers (BSDCs), 103 KYP Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) and 85 KYP Polytechnic and Engineering Colleges. Spanning all 38 districts presence in all 534 blocks, these institutes provided essential skills and education, transforming lives and fostering a brighter future for aspiring individuals throughout the land. From its humble beginnings, KYP has grown into one of India's largest employability programs.

The initiative has enrolled **3,131,689 youth—51% male and 49% female.** Of these, 2,390,960 have received training, and 2,320,124 have earned certifications. Currently, 96,699 learners are actively pursuing their education, contributing to a brighter future for themselves and their communities. Each number in this initiative represents a powerful story of transformation, confidence, and self-belief among the youth .

The impact on employability and self-earning has been profound, particularly in Bihar, where KYP has significantly enhanced the job prospects of its graduates. Employers have begun to recognize the value of KYP graduates, noting their ability to communicate effectively during interviews, their proficiency in handling computers with ease, and their demonstration of professionalism and teamwork in the workplace. These attributes not only reflect the skills acquired through the program but also the newfound confidence that empowers these individuals to thrive in their careers. This has translated into higher job placements under BSDM's domain skill programs and increased confidence among youth to start their own small businesses, such as cyber cafés, tuition centers, beauty salons, and service ventures. Many KYP alumni have turned into first-generation entrepreneurs, supporting their families and becoming role models in their communities.

Additionally, some of them are government employees, such as schoolteachers, postal assistant with salaries reaching up to 45,000/-.

KYP's biggest success lies in its inclusiveness. It has given rural youth, and women access to modern learning without leaving their hometowns. Its digital platform allows real-time monitoring, online assessments, and transparent certification; making the entire system accountable and scalable.

KYP didn't just teach skills — it changed mindsets, instilled confidence, and brought dignity to learning.

Training for tomorrow: the industry 4.0 revolution in collaboration with SDI-B

Through a dynamic partnership, BSDM candidates are now gaining invaluable exposure to cutting-edge fields such as smart manufacturing, solar technology, advanced electrical systems, and data-driven operations. To date, they have collectively received an impressive 60,000 hours of training, with 15 graduates successfully placed in reputable industries.

The program places a strong emphasis on hands-on training, simulation-based learning, and practical project execution, ensuring that candidates are wellprepared for the demands of the workforce. As a result, graduates from these programs are entering the job market with confidence, securing positions that offer salaries ranging from ₹20,000 to ₹25,000 per month. This marks a significant entry point for sustainable livelihoods, empowering them to build promising futures in their chosen fields. A Ripple Effect Across Bihar. The SDI partnership has sparked a ripple effect across Bihar's districts. Young people from smaller towns and rural areas are now aspiring to join industry-aligned training.

Bihar strategic shift towards skilling endeavors

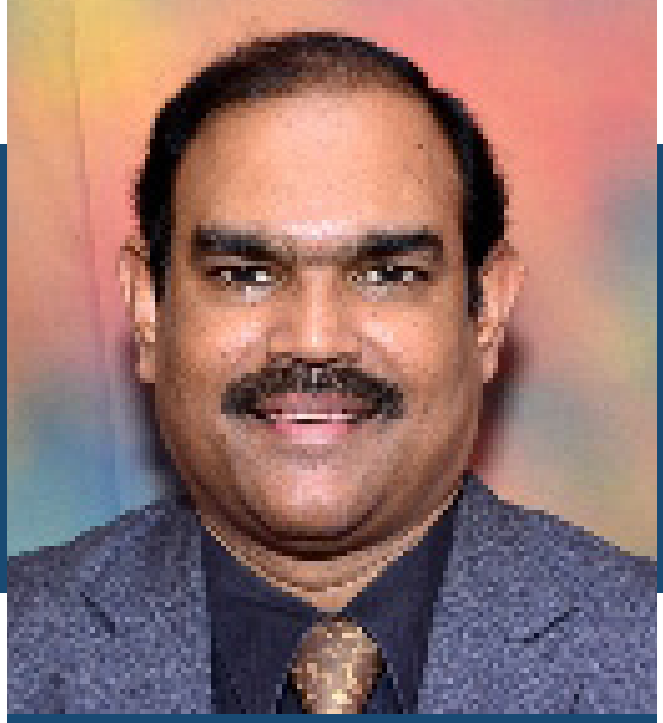
The Government of Bihar has undertaken a series of strategic and forward-looking initiatives to enhance workforce readiness and align skilling efforts with the evolving demands of new-age industries. The state's approach emphasizes employability-driven skilling, offering both short-term and long-term training programs that are directly mapped to industry requirements and future labour market trends.

Flagship interventions such as the CM-PRATIGYA Internship Scheme, Mega Skill Centres, Skill University, and the Overseas Employment and Entrepreneurship Development Program have been conceptualized to equip youth with hands-on exposure in domains like digital transformation, AI-enabled tools, data analytics, freelancing ecosystems, and entrepreneurship incubation.

The CM-PRATIGYA Internship Scheme, in particular, has enabled thousands of students to participate in industry-integrated internships, fostering experiential learning and professional readiness for emerging job markets. Simultaneously, the Mega Skill Centre initiative—currently in the advanced stages of implementation—aims to establish state-of-the-art, sector-specific academies across all nine divisional headquarters of Bihar, focusing on the state's most prominent and high-demand sectors.

To date, over **1,20,000 youth** have expressed interest in enrolling under these programs to gain industry exposure, enhance employability, and access sustainable livelihood opportunities, reflecting the growing aspiration of Bihar's young workforce to participate in India's knowledge- and technology-driven economy.

AI-supplemented workforce, gig economy & entrepreneurship in India



Dr. Amarendra Pani
JOINT DIRECTOR, RESEARCH
ASSOCIATION OF INDIAN UNIVERSITIES

As the world transitions towards a digitally driven and innovation-led economy, India stands at a transformative juncture—where technology, creativity, and entrepreneurship converge to redefine the nature of work. The rise of the gig economy and the emergence of an AI-supplemented workforce are reshaping employment structures, creating new opportunities, and inspiring a culture of entrepreneurial resilience and adaptability. The gig economy, with its emphasis on flexibility, independence, and outcome-based engagement, has become a critical component of India's evolving labour market. Millions of professionals today are leveraging digital platforms to offer services, build careers, and contribute meaningfully to the nation's (economic) growth. This paradigm shift represents not only a change in how work is performed but also how talent is nurtured, recognized, and rewarded.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has further accelerated this transformation by augmenting human capabilities, optimizing decision-making, and unlocking new avenues for innovation. The AI-supplemented workforce is not a distant concept—it is a present reality, empowering professionals to move beyond repetitive tasks and focus on creativity, critical thinking, and strategic problem-solving. As industries adopt AI-driven tools, the demand for digitally skilled, emotionally intelligent, and ethically grounded professionals is at an all-time high.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has rightly emphasized the need to align education with the emerging dynamics of technology, entrepreneurship, and innovation. By promoting multidisciplinary learning, design thinking, and vocational integration, NEP 2020 paves the way for developing a generation that can thrive in the gig economy and lead in the age of AI. This vision resonates deeply with the Association of Indian Universities (AIU), which continues to advocate for the integration of employability, skilling, and entrepreneurial mindsets within higher education.

AIU has been at the forefront of bridging the gap between academia and the world of work by facilitating collaborations that inspire innovation and self-employment.Through initiatives that encourage start-up incubation, experiential learning, and skill enhancement, AIU seeks to empower students not merely as job seekers but as job creators and change leaders. In the near future, AIU envisions strengthened partnerships with multiple national and international bodies that aimed at promoting digital skilling, entrepreneurial capacity-building, and research on future work models. The intersection of gig work, AI-driven innovation, and entrepreneurship presents India with both challenges and unprecedented opportunities. The key lies in reimagining education and skilling systems to build resilience, adaptability, and ethical responsibility among youth. As we navigate this transformation, it becomes imperative to ensure that every learner is equipped not just with technical proficiency but with the vision, empathy, and creativity required to lead in an increasingly complex world.

At AIU, we reaffirm our commitment to empowering India's human capital through education that integrates technology with purpose and innovation with inclusion. By nurturing entrepreneurial spirit and supporting the evolution of an AI-ready workforce, we aim to contribute to a future where India is not only a participant but a leader in the global knowledge and innovation economy.

I extend my sincere appreciation to all institutions, industry partners, and innovators who continue to contribute to this evolving discourse. Together, let us build a workforce that is flexible, future-ready, and driven by the shared goal of transforming India into a hub of sustainable, technology-enabled, and inclusive growth.

Appendix

Survey methodology & data collection

The India Skills Report 2026 integrates two flagship studies: the ETS Global Employability Test (G.E.T) and the India Hiring Intent Survey – Early Career Edition 2026. Together, these datasets offer a comprehensive, data-backed view of India's evolving talent ecosystem — reflecting both the supply side (student employability) and the demand side (corporate hiring intent).

The 13th edition of the study evaluated over 700,000 candidates across 28 states and 9 Union Territories, complemented by insights from 1,000+ employers spanning 15+ industries. The dual methodology ensures a balanced perspective that maps employability readiness with industry demand across emerging economic sectors.

ETS Global Employability Test

The ETS Wheebox Global Employability Test is a standardized online skill evaluation designed to measure the job readiness of India's youth in alignment with evolving global workforce demands. The 2026 test was conducted across higher education institutions, technical universities, vocational centers, and polytechnic institutions, as well as in select international partner regions.

The assessment framework incorporated psychometric and domain-specific modules assessing:

- Educational and technical competence: Employability by discipline (Engineering, Commerce, Arts, Science, MBA, ITI, etc.).
- Cognitive and non-technical skills: Communication, critical thinking, adaptability, teamwork, and emotional intelligence.
- State and city employability rankings: Identifying regional strengths and urban employability hubs.
- Gender and inclusion parameters: Capturing employability variance and access by gender and location.
- Digital proficiency and internship readiness: Measuring familiarity with tools, online assessments, and work exposure.
- Salary and work preference data – Understanding the aspirations of job seekers and their preferred employment geographies.

Methodological rigor

Data collection and validation adhered to rigorous statistical methodologies to prevent bias and ensure accuracy. Weightage adjustments were applied across academic institutions and regional clusters to maintain representation. A mix of qualitative and quantitative indicators was analyzed to establish a composite employability index for 2026.

The 2026 G.E.T framework also aligned with global ETS benchmarking standards, introducing AI-assisted proctoring and skill inference algorithms that capture behavioral, communication, and analytical traits with high precision.

India hiring intent survey: early career edition 2026

The India Hiring Intent Survey 2026, conducted between September and November 2025, collected responses from over 1,000 corporations across diverse industries, including IT/ITeS, BFSI, Manufacturing, Core Infrastructure, Automotive, FMCG, Pharmaceuticals, Renewable Energy, and Healthcare.

This year's survey focused on early-career hiring, with attention to workforce distribution, sectoral demand, and digital hiring transformation.

Core areas of analysis

- Industry-specific hiring trends – Projected recruitment patterns for FY 2026–27, including emerging roles in AI, data science, and sustainability.
- Regional hiring intent – Distribution of hiring across Tier 1, 2, and 3 cities; identification of new employment clusters.
- Experience mix – Insights into hiring intent across experience brackets (Freshers, 1–5 years, 6–10 years, 11–15 years, 15+ years).

- Flexible workforce models – Analysis of employment type distribution: permanent, contractual, gig, and apprenticeship.
- AI in recruitment – Tracking adoption rates of AI tools for candidate screening, interviewing, and recommendation.

Methodology & data integrity

The survey applied multi-stage sampling and stratified weighting to ensure representation across sectors and regions. Responses were anonymized, standardized, and analyzed using AI-based statistical validation and cross-sector normalization for consistency. All participating organizations' data were treated with strict confidentiality, adhering to global data privacy and ethics standards.

Data analysis & reporting

Data from both the ETS G.E.T and Hiring Intent Survey were integrated using advanced analytical models, combining:

- Descriptive statistics – Percentile scores, state-level averages, and role-based employability.
- Comparative year-on-year analysis – Benchmarking 2026 trends against the ISR 2025 baseline.
- Predictive analytics – Forecasting employability and hiring demand based on skill adoption and digital transformation indicators.
- Cross-sector correlation mapping – Linking academic qualifications with emerging industry requirements.

Visualization of insights leveraged tools such as Power BI, Tableau, and Python-based dashboards, allowing layered interpretation of data, from micro-level employability insights to macroeconomic workforce projections.

Together, these analytics provide a 360-degree understanding of India's workforce readiness, identifying where supply meets demand and where intervention is most needed for equitable skill development.

Invitation to explore additional resources

Dear Readers,

In keeping with the India Skills Report's commitment to transparency and open access to knowledge, we invite you to explore the supplementary resources and datasets accompanying the India Skills Report 2026.

These resources offer deeper insights into the research methodologies, sample distributions, and extended findings referenced throughout this year's report.

Extended information

You can access more detailed breakdowns of state-wise employability, salary ranges, and gender inclusion metrics. Supplementary visuals and data tables provide deeper visibility into regional and sectoral patterns.

Enhanced understanding

Interactive dashboards and downloadable datasets offer expanded analytics — including employability scores by qualification, hiring intent segmentation, and AI adoption metrics, for those seeking a more comprehensive perspective.

Reader's discretion

These resources are designed to enhance the report's accessibility without disrupting its flow. Readers may explore specific datasets, visualizations, or methodology notes according to their research interests.

Comprehensive documentation

Accompanying materials include technical specifications, survey instruments, and validation frameworks that detail every aspect of the data collection and reporting process. This ensures methodological transparency and replicability across future ISR editions.

Research methodology transparency

The ISR 2026 adheres to international standards of educational assessment integrity. Detailed documentation of survey design, sampling, normalization, and AI-based validation processes are available to academic, corporate, and policy research partners for further examination.

We trust these resources will enrich your understanding of India's evolving talent landscape and support informed decision-making across academia, industry, and policy domains.

Sincerely,
India Skills Report 2026 Team

Glossary of Terms and Acronyms

TERM/ACRONYM	DEFINITION
ISR	India Skills Report – Annual nationwide study on employability and hiring trends.
ETS G.E.T	ETS Global Employability Test – Standardized online assessment evaluating job readiness and skills.
AICTE	All India Council for Technical Education – Governing body for higher and technical education.
BFSI	Banking, Financial Services, and Insurance sector.
FMCG	Fast-Moving Consumer Goods sector.
NEP 2020	National Education Policy 2020 – India's framework for education reform and skills integration
AI/ML	Artificial Intelligence / Machine Learning
UPI	Unified Payments Interface – India's digital payments infrastructure.
GCC	Global Capability Centers – international enterprise operations in India.
NEEM/NEEM 2.0	National Employability Enhancement Mission – apprenticeship and skilling initiative.
GET Score	Composite index reflecting employability performance across domains.
Tier Classification	City categorization: Tier 1 (Metro), Tier 2 (Emerging City), Tier 3 (Developing Hub).
LFPR	Labour Force Participation Rate – proportion of working-age population active in the labor market.
AI in Recruitment	Use of Artificial Intelligence tools for candidate sourcing, screening, and assessments.
SaaS	Software as a Service, refers to software innovation for specific use cases delivered via cloud.
Hybrid Work	Employment model combining remote and on-site work flexibility.
Skill India Mission	Government initiative for large-scale skill development and workforce training.
FAME-II	Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Electric Vehicles scheme (Government of India)
SDG Goals	United Nations Sustainable Development Goals for inclusive and sustainable growth.
GVA	Gross Value Added is a measure of the value of goods and services produced in an economy, sector, or industry
CAGR	Compound Annual Growth Rate – the mean annual growth rate of an investment or metric over a specified time period longer than one year.
GDP	Gross Domestic Product – the total monetary value of all finished goods and services produced within a country in a specific time period.

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