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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

From More Jobs to Better Jobs: Reading the Employment Data Honestly

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From More Jobs to Better Jobs: Reading the Employment Data Honestly



The Indian Express

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INTERVIEW ANGLE

"The column says 9 crore young people not in education, employment or training cannot all be called unemployed, since 88 per cent are in domestic duties. Is that a statistical clarification or a way of defining the problem away?"

Source: [Original editorial](#)

The Indian Express



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THE LIFT LINE

WHY THIS EDITORIAL MATTERS FOR YOUR EXAM

Employment answers fail in a characteristic way: candidates mix a monthly PLFS headline, an annual usual-status figure and a KLEMS aggregate into one paragraph, and the examiner watches three incompatible measures asserted as one fact.

This column, by an author who sits on the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister, is effectively a tutorial in reading labour statistics, and that is its exam value regardless of whether you accept its optimism. It hands you four precision moves: CWS against usual status, work against livelihood, NEET against unemployed, and headcount against quality. It is also the ideal counterpoint file: pair its data with the sceptical counter in this analysis and you have both halves of a balanced 15-marker on [jobless growth](#), written from the same numbers.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The author. Gourav Vallabh, professor of Finance at XLRI and **part-time member of the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister**, writing in the Indian Express of August 31, 2026.

The dataset. The RBI's KLEMS **productivity database** provisionally estimates employment rose from **47.15 crore in 2014-15 to 64.33 crore in 2023-24**, an addition of **17.18 crore workers over nine years, about 1.9 crore a year**.

The report that frames the piece. NITI Aayog's **Reimagining Skilling for Viksit Bharat@2047**, released **August 18**, proposes demand-led, industry-linked, outcome-oriented skilling. It estimates **9 crore young Indians neither in education, employment nor training**, excluding active job-seekers, with **about 88 per cent engaged in domestic duties**.

The instruments in place. Over **1.64 crore** candidates trained or oriented under the **Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana**; over **56.08 lakh apprentices** engaged since 2016; **23 lakh plus direct start-up jobs by April 2026**; from **4 unicorns in 2014 to over 120**, with combined valuation above **350 billion dollars**; about **half of recognised start-ups from Tier II and Tier III cities**; over **45 per cent with at least one woman director or partner by December 2025**.

The women's numbers. Female labour force participation in usual status rose from **23.3 per cent in 2017-18 to 41.7 per cent in 2023-24**. Women hold **56 per cent of Jan Dhan accounts**, receive **about two-thirds of MUDRA loans**, and number **over 10 crore in self-help groups**.

THE ANALYSIS

The central reframing. The base has expanded; the question is **how the base produces formal jobs, higher productivity, better wages and career progression**. This moves the debate off the sterile created-versus-destroyed axis onto quality, where the honest difficulties live.

The statistical discipline, which is the piece's spine. Monthly PLFS bulletins classify activity by **Current Weekly Status**, the preceding seven days; annual surveys use **usual status**, the durable yearly pattern. **They are not interchangeable**: the monthly series tracks short-term movement, the annual series assesses structural progress. The same discipline applies to slogans: **2 crore jobs a year cannot mean 2 crore salaried government posts**, and the KLEMS record of about 1.9 crore additional workers a year is meaningful expansion that still **cannot settle the quality debate**, which is exactly why the column's dashboard proposal matters.

The NEET clarification, and its double edge. Nine crore young people not in education, employment or training are **not all unemployed**: 88 per cent are in domestic duties. But the column immediately supplies the other edge: **millions of young women remain outside paid work because unpaid care, safety, mobility, social norms and limited local opportunity restrict choice**. The category is not unemployment; it is constrained choice, and its policy instruments are childcare, transport, hostels and nearby formal work.

The dashboard, the piece's concrete ask. India should publish an **employment dashboard** covering **formalisation, real wage growth, social security, hours worked, sectoral productivity and movement from low-income work into stable careers**. This is the operational heart of the column: it would convert every quality claim, the author's included, into something checkable.

The honest concessions. Educated unemployment among first-time entrants **is real**. Public vacancies should be **filled transparently, with examination integrity and timely results non-negotiable**. And the government **cannot be the sole employer**; micro-enterprises that scale, formalise and hire are the next step.

DATA AND INSTITUTIONS VAULT

PRELIMS-GRADE FACTS:

THE EMPLOYMENT AGGREGATES:

RBI's KLEMS database provisionally estimates employment at 64.33 crore in 2023-24, from 47.15 crore in 2014-15.

That is 17.18 crore additional workers over nine years, about 1.9 crore a year.

KLEMS stands for capital (K), labour (L), energy (E), materials (M) and services (S) inputs to productivity.

The Periodic Labour Force Survey is conducted by the National Statistics Office.

Current Weekly Status classifies activity over the preceding seven days; usual status over the year.

THE SKILLING AND START-UP STACK:

NITI Aayog released Reimagining Skilling for Viksit Bharat@2047 on August 18, 2026.

The report estimates 9 crore youth not in education, employment or training, 88 per cent in domestic duties.

Over 1.64 crore candidates have been trained or oriented under PMKVY.

Over 56.08 lakh apprentices have been engaged since 2016.

Start-ups reported more than 23 lakh direct jobs by April 2026.

India moved from 4 unicorns in 2014 to over 120, with combined valuation above 350 billion dollars.

About half of recognised start-ups come from Tier II and Tier III cities.

THE WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT DATA:

Female labour force participation in usual status rose from 23.3 per cent in 2017-18 to 41.7 per cent in 2023-24.

Women hold 56 per cent of Jan Dhan accounts and receive about two-thirds of MUDRA loans.

Over 10 crore women are members of self-help groups.

Over 45 per cent of recognised start-ups had at least one woman director or partner by December 2025.

KLEMS employment is not PLFS employment. *KLEMS is an RBI productivity database whose employment series is built for input accounting and counts all workers including unpaid family labour; PLFS is the NSO's survey measure with its own status definitions. Quoting a KLEMS aggregate as "the PLFS shows" is a citation error examiners are equipped to notice, and the two series can legitimately differ.*

THE DEBATE

The record is real. A 17-crore expansion with formalisation instruments, EPFO, e-Shram, GST registration, spreading underneath; the sharpest rise in female participation in the survey record; a start-up sector generating verifiable direct employment from smaller cities. The column's willingness to discipline its own side's slogans, 2 crore posts, NEET as unemployment, marks it as analysis rather than advocacy.

The record is thinner than it looks. Composition is the tell: much of the added work is self-employment and unpaid family labour, consistent with distress absorption rather than dynamism, and rising female participation partly reflects unpaid agricultural work. Skilling counts measure [throughput](#), not placement or wage gains. Real wage growth, the single best quality indicator, is conspicuously the statistic no celebratory account leads with, and the column's dashboard, which would settle the matter, does not yet exist.

Where the truth likely sits. Both sides are arguing from the same aggregates because the quality metrics are unpublished, which makes the dashboard proposal the only genuinely decisive item in the debate. A candidate can hold the position honestly: expansion is real, its composition is contested, and the resolution is measurement, formalisation rates, real wages, social security coverage and transition into stable careers, published at fixed frequency.

HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS

Four precision moves, each worth marks on any labour question.

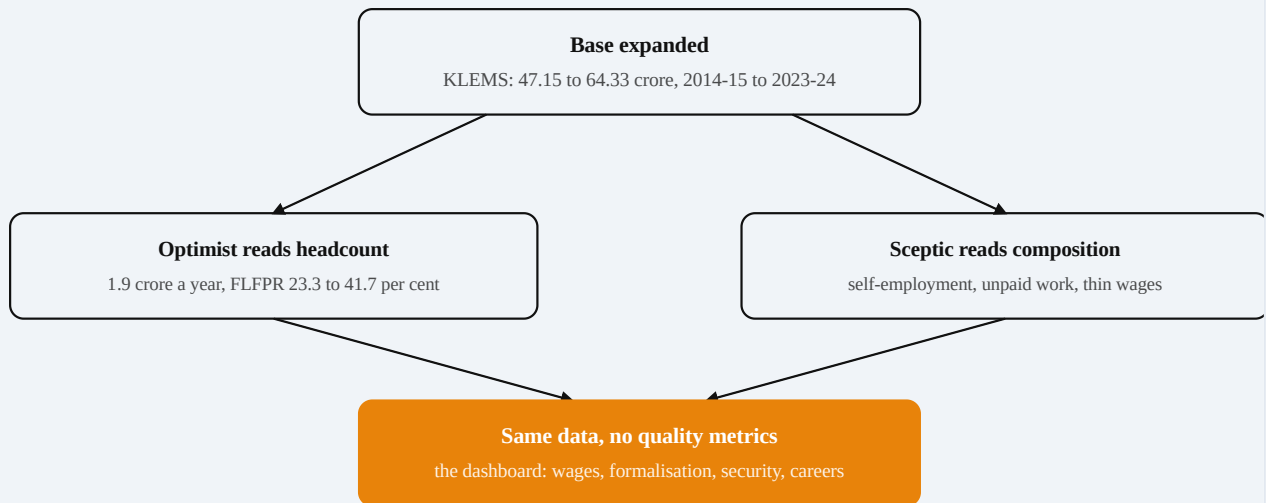
Match the frequency to the claim. Short-term shock: monthly CWS. Structural progress: annual usual status. Never cross them.

Separate work from livelihood. Headcount says someone worked; formalisation, wages, social security and hours say whether the work sustains a life. Name which you are measuring.

Unpack composite categories. NEET contains the unemployed, the discouraged and the care-constrained; each needs a different instrument. Splitting a category correctly is analysis; quoting it whole is recitation.

Demand the metric that would settle the debate. Where both sides argue from the same aggregate, the answer is better measurement, here, an employment-quality dashboard. Proposing the decisive metric is the highest-value move available in a data dispute.

DIAGRAM-IN-WORDS



Both readings are built from the same aggregates because the deciding statistics are unpublished. The employment dashboard is not a bureaucratic garnish; it is the resolution mechanism for the whole debate.

TAKEAWAY BOX

Precision with labour data is the argument: work is not livelihood, NEET is not unemployed, and a monthly pulse is not a structural trend.

KLEMS (RBI): 47.15 to 64.33 crore employment, 2014-15 to 2023-24; NITI Aayog's Reimagining Skilling for Viksit Bharat@2047, August 18; 9 crore NEET youth, 88 per cent in domestic duties; PMKVY 1.64 crore, apprentices 56.08 lakh since 2016; start-ups 23 lakh direct jobs, 120 plus unicorns; FLFPR usual status 23.3 (2017-18) to 41.7 per cent (2023-24); women: 56 per cent of Jan Dhan accounts, two-thirds of MUDRA loans, 10 crore in SHGs; CWS versus usual status.

Structure a jobs answer as measurement first, then composition, then instruments: frequency discipline (CWS against usual status), work against livelihood, NEET unpacked into constrained care work, then skilling with outcome linkage, micro-enterprise scaling, and the care-and-mobility stack for women; close with the employment-quality dashboard as the accountability device.

If you could force the publication of exactly one new labour statistic at quarterly frequency, which would it be, and what behaviour would publishing it change?

Sources: The Indian Express, NITI Aayog, RBI

Source: From More Jobs to Better Jobs: Reading the Employment Data Honestly — Ujjari.com | Free UPSC & State PCS
Editorial Analysis

● KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE

Writing in the Indian Express, Gourav Vallabh of XLRI, a part-time member of the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister, argues that India's employment base has genuinely expanded, from 47.15 crore in 2014-15 to 64.33 crore in 2023-24 on the RBI's provisional KLEMS estimates, and that the next decade's challenge is converting that scale into quality: formal jobs, higher productivity, better wages and career progression, with women as the decisive measure of the transformation.



SUPPORTING

- NITI Aayog's report Reimagining Skilling for Viksit Bharat@2047, released on August 18, frames the skilling challenge as demand-led, industry-linked and outcome-oriented, and estimates 9 crore young Indians neither in education, employment nor training, about 88 per cent of them engaged in domestic duties, which makes calling all of them unemployed inaccurate while still marking a vast reserve of constrained choice, especially for young women.
- Labour data must be read at the right frequency: the monthly PLFS bulletin's Current Weekly Status classifies activity over seven days and tracks short-term movement, while the annual survey's usual status captures the durable pattern, and the two are not interchangeable; likewise the aspiration of 2 crore jobs a year cannot mean 2 crore salaried government posts, since the KLEMS series itself records about 1.9 crore additional workers a year over nine years.
- Building blocks exist at scale: over 1.64 crore candidates trained or oriented under PMKVY, over 56.08 lakh apprentices engaged since 2016, more than 23 lakh direct start-up jobs by April 2026, over 120 unicorns against four in 2014, with about half of recognised start-ups from Tier II and Tier III cities and over 45 per cent with at least one woman director by December 2025.
- Women are the decisive frontier: female labour force participation in usual status rose from 23.3 per cent in 2017-18 to 41.7 per cent in 2023-24, women hold 56 per cent of Jan Dhan accounts, receive about two-thirds of MUDRA loans and number over 10 crore in self-help groups, but the enabling stack must now extend to childcare, safe transport, hostels, flexible formal work and quality jobs closer to home.



COUNTER

The sceptical reading is that the numbers celebrated here measure work, not livelihoods: KLEMS counts unpaid family helpers and subsistence self-employment alongside salaried jobs, so 17 crore additional workers is compatible with stagnant real wages and rising informality; the rise in female participation partly reflects distress-driven and unpaid agricultural work rather than quality employment; skilling counts certify throughput, not placement; and educated unemployment among first-time entrants, which the column itself concedes is real, is precisely the gap aggregate expansion cannot answer.



WAY FORWARD

Publish the employment dashboard the column proposes, covering formalisation, real wage growth, social security coverage, hours worked, sectoral productivity and movement from low-income work into stable careers, so the quality debate runs on published metrics rather than duelling anecdotes. Fill sanctioned public posts transparently with non-negotiable examination integrity, help viable micro-enterprises scale, formalise and hire, and match the welfare stack for women with childcare, transport, hostels and flexible formal work.

A compact among government, industry and education converts scale into quality.


MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK
QUESTION

India's employment challenge has shifted from the quantity of work to its quality. Examine this proposition with reference to recent labour force data, and suggest a framework for measuring and improving employment quality. (250 words)

INTRODUCTION

India's labour market has passed a quantitative threshold: employment on the RBI's KLEMS database rose from about 47 crore in 2014-15 to over 64 crore in 2023-24, and female labour force participation in usual status climbed from 23.3 per cent in 2017-18 to 41.7 per cent in 2023-24. The binding constraint is shifting from the number of workers to the nature of their work.

BODY

Three measurement disciplines come first, because the quality debate fails without them. Frequency: the monthly PLFS bulletin's Current Weekly Status records activity over the preceding seven days and tracks the short-term pulse, while annual usual-status data captures structural change; conclusions drawn across the two frames mislead.

Composition: aggregate employment growth of roughly 1.9 crore a year includes self-employment and unpaid family work, so headcount expansion coexists with thin earnings; only indicators of formalisation, real wages, social security and hours can separate livelihoods from mere work. Category: of the roughly 9 crore youth neither in education, employment nor training, about 88 per cent are in domestic duties, mostly women constrained by unpaid care, safety, mobility and local opportunity; they are neither unemployed nor free to choose, and policy for them is childcare, transport and nearby formal work rather than job fairs.

On the supply side, skilling through PMKVY and apprenticeships needs outcome linkage of the kind NITI Aayog's 2026 skilling blueprint proposes; on the demand side, start-ups, over 23 lakh direct jobs and half of them from smaller cities, and scalable micro-enterprises are the realistic engines, since government posts, which must be filled transparently, cannot absorb a workforce adding millions yearly. A published employment-quality dashboard would anchor accountability for all of it.

CONCLUSION

The employment question India must now answer is not whether work is being created but whether work is becoming a career. Measuring quality honestly, and building the care and mobility infrastructure that lets women convert participation into progression, is the difference between a demographic dividend counted and one earned.


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