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Artificial Intelligence and Employment: Rethinking the Future of Work

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Abstract

Artificial intelligence (AI) is rapidly transforming employment by changing the tasks, skills, occupations, and organizational structures that define contemporary work. The emergence of generative AI (GenAI) has intensified concerns about technological unemployment while creating opportunities for productivity improvement, new occupations, and human-AI collaboration. This perspective article argues that the debate should move beyond the question of whether AI will replace workers and instead examine how AI will transform jobs, redistribute opportunities, influence job quality, and reshape career pathways. Current evidence indicates that AI exposure is widespread but uneven across occupations, countries, education levels, and demographic groups. The International Labour Organization estimates that approximately one in four workers globally is in an occupation with some exposure to GenAI, while emphasizing that job transformation is more likely than complete replacement. The article examines AI-driven employment transformation, unequal exposure, youth employment, reskilling, job quality, and the implications for emerging economies such as India. It argues that the employment consequences of AI are not technologically predetermined. They will depend on organizational decisions, education systems, labour-market institutions, and public policy. A human-centred approach to AI adoption is therefore essential to ensure that technological progress contributes to productive, inclusive, and sustainable employment.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence; Generative AI; Employment; Future of Work; Automation; Labour Market; Job Transformation; Reskilling; Digital Inequality; AI Literacy

Introduction

Artificial intelligence has evolved from a specialized technological field into a major force influencing economic and social life. AI systems are increasingly used in recruitment, customer service, finance, healthcare, education, manufacturing, software development, research, and administration. The rapid development of generative AI has expanded this transformation because contemporary systems can perform increasingly sophisticated cognitive tasks, including writing, summarizing, coding, translation, data analysis, and content generation.

This development has revived a longstanding debate concerning technological change and employment. One perspective emphasizes technological unemployment and argues that increasingly capable AI systems could eliminate substantial numbers of jobs. Another perspective highlights technological complementarity, suggesting that AI can augment human capabilities, improve productivity, and create new employment opportunities.

Neither perspective fully captures the complexity of the emerging labour market. The central issue is not simply whether an occupation will disappear, but **how its tasks, skills, wages, working conditions, and career pathways will change.**

The International Labour Organization's 2025 assessment estimates that approximately one in four workers globally is in an occupation with some exposure to GenAI. Importantly, the analysis suggests that transformation of jobs is more likely than complete replacement because most occupations continue to contain tasks requiring human involvement. ([ilo.org](https://www.ilo.org/publications/2025/01/01/20250101))

Therefore, the future of employment should be understood primarily as a process of **job transformation rather than simply job destruction.**

From Job Replacement to Job Transformation

A useful way to understand AI and employment is to distinguish between occupations and tasks. Most occupations consist of numerous activities, and AI may automate some of these activities without eliminating the entire occupation.

For example, an accountant may use AI to classify transactions, identify anomalies, and prepare preliminary reports while continuing to perform professional judgement, regulatory interpretation, and client communication. A teacher may use AI to develop learning materials and assist with assessment while continuing to provide mentoring, classroom interaction, and emotional support.

This task-based perspective changes the traditional debate about automation. Instead of asking whether AI can perform a particular occupation, it is more useful to ask **which components of that occupation can be automated and which require human capabilities.**

The ILO's research shows that clerical occupations have particularly high exposure to GenAI, while exposure is also increasing in highly digitized professional and technical occupations. However, exposure does not automatically mean job loss. ([ilo.org](https://www.ilo.org/publications/2025/01/01/20250101))

AI is therefore likely to produce different levels of transformation, ranging from limited technological assistance to substantial task automation. The consequences for workers will depend on how organizations redesign jobs in response.

AI, Productivity, and Human-AI Collaboration

AI has considerable potential to increase workplace productivity. By automating repetitive information-processing tasks, AI can allow employees to devote more time to activities requiring creativity, judgement, problem-solving, and interpersonal communication.

This creates the possibility of **AI-augmented employment**, in which humans and machines perform complementary functions. Instead of replacing workers, AI can enable them to complete tasks more efficiently and process larger amounts of information.

The OECD has reported that generative AI is increasingly being used by small and medium-sized enterprises and that firms identify benefits related to employee performance and addressing skill gaps. ([oecd.org](https://www.oecd.org/publications/2025/01/01/20250101))

However, productivity gains do not automatically produce better employment outcomes. If organizations use AI primarily to reduce labour costs, productivity improvements may result in workforce reductions or greater work intensity. Conversely, if AI is used to augment employees, it may create opportunities for higher-value work and new services.

The key issue is therefore not simply whether AI increases productivity, but **how productivity gains are distributed between employers, workers, consumers, and society**.

Unequal Exposure to Artificial Intelligence

The effects of AI are unlikely to be evenly distributed. Workers differ in their exposure according to occupation, education, income, gender, geography, and access to digital technologies.

The IMF estimates that almost 40% of global employment is exposed to AI, with exposure considerably higher in advanced economies because of their concentration of cognitive-intensive occupations. AI can both complement and substitute for human labour, producing different outcomes across groups. ([imf.org](https://www.imf.org))

The ILO similarly reports significant differences in exposure by gender and income level, with women and workers in high-income economies more likely to be employed in highly exposed occupations. ([ilo.org](https://www.ilo.org))

This raises an important social concern: **AI could reinforce existing inequalities if access to its benefits is concentrated among highly educated and digitally skilled workers**.

Workers who possess technological knowledge and access to training may use AI as a productivity-enhancing tool, whereas workers in routine occupations may experience greater employment insecurity. AI policy should therefore be considered not only a technology issue but also an issue of employment equity and social inclusion.

Youth Employment and Entry-Level Jobs

One of the most significant emerging concerns is the effect of AI on young workers.

Entry-level positions traditionally provide opportunities for individuals to gain experience and develop professional skills. Many occupations begin with routine tasks through which employees gradually acquire organizational knowledge and expertise. If these tasks are increasingly automated, organizations may have fewer incentives to recruit inexperienced workers.

This could create an **entry-level employment paradox**: young people may be expected to possess AI-related skills and professional experience while simultaneously having fewer opportunities through which to acquire that experience.

This issue is particularly important in countries with large youth populations. The ILO has highlighted continuing challenges in youth employment and the potential for AI to affect young workers in occupations exposed to technological change.

Education systems therefore need to provide students with more than technical knowledge. Graduates will require **AI literacy, critical thinking, communication, adaptability, ethical reasoning, and domain-specific expertise**.

Not every worker needs to become an AI engineer. Rather, workers across professions need to understand how AI can be used responsibly within their respective fields.

Reskilling and the Future of Human Capital

The rapid development of AI makes lifelong learning increasingly important. Skills that are valuable today may become less valuable as technology changes.

The World Economic Forum's *Future of Jobs Report 2025* projects substantial labour-market restructuring by 2030, with 170 million jobs potentially created and 92 million displaced, resulting in a projected net increase of 78 million jobs. The report also indicates that a significant proportion of workers' existing skills may change during this period. ([weforum.org](https://www.weforum.org))

These figures should not be interpreted as precise predictions, but they demonstrate the scale of potential transformation.

Reskilling should therefore be treated as a shared responsibility. Workers need opportunities to acquire new capabilities, employers need to invest in training, universities need to update curricula, and governments need to provide accessible lifelong-learning systems.

Future workers will increasingly need combinations of **AI literacy, analytical thinking, creativity, adaptability, communication, and professional expertise**. Human-centred skills are likely to remain important even as technological capabilities expand.

AI and Job Quality

The employment debate frequently focuses on the number of jobs created or eliminated while paying less attention to job quality.

AI can improve working conditions by reducing repetitive, dangerous, or physically demanding tasks. However, it can also introduce new forms of workplace surveillance and algorithmic management. Employees may increasingly be monitored through automated systems that measure productivity, attendance, communication, or performance.

Automated recruitment and performance evaluation can also create risks of algorithmic discrimination. If AI systems are trained using biased historical data, they may reproduce or intensify existing inequalities.

Consequently, responsible AI adoption requires transparency, privacy protection, worker participation, and meaningful human oversight. The objective should not be to maximize automation but to use AI in ways that improve productivity **without undermining worker dignity, autonomy, and fairness**.

AI and Employment in India

The employment implications of AI are particularly significant for India because of its large workforce, expanding digital economy, and important information-technology and business-process sectors.

India has considerable potential to benefit from AI through software development, digital services, research, entrepreneurship, cybersecurity, and AI-enabled business models. At the same time, routine information-processing and business-process activities may become increasingly automated.

This creates both an opportunity and a policy challenge. India can potentially move toward higher-value AI-enabled services, but doing so requires investment in education, digital infrastructure, research, entrepreneurship, and workforce development.

AI literacy should extend beyond major metropolitan centres and technology professionals. Workers in smaller cities, rural areas, education, healthcare, agriculture, manufacturing, and services should also have opportunities to access AI-enabled tools and training.

The central policy question for India is therefore not whether AI should be adopted, but **how AI can be used to increase the productivity and employability of a broad section of the workforce.**

Policy and Institutional Responses

Governments, employers, educational institutions, and workers all have important roles in managing AI-driven employment transformation.

First, education systems should incorporate AI literacy across disciplines rather than limiting it to computer science. Second, governments should support accessible reskilling and lifelong-learning programmes. Third, workers affected by technological transitions should have adequate social protection. Fourth, regulations should address algorithmic discrimination, workplace surveillance, privacy, and automated employment decisions.

Employers should also involve workers in AI adoption decisions and provide training before major technological changes are implemented. The World Economic Forum reports that many employers expect to pursue workforce upskilling in response to technological transformation, although a substantial proportion also anticipate workforce reductions where AI automates tasks. ([weforum.org](https://www.weforum.org))

This illustrates a fundamental choice: organizations can use AI primarily as a workforce-reduction mechanism or as a tool for workforce development and augmentation.

Conclusion

Artificial intelligence is transforming employment in ways that extend beyond the simple creation or destruction of jobs. It is changing tasks, skills, occupational structures, workplace relationships, productivity, and career pathways.

Current evidence suggests that many jobs are more likely to be transformed than completely eliminated. Nevertheless, the benefits and risks of AI will be distributed unevenly. Workers in routine and highly digitized occupations may face greater disruption, while workers with technological and complementary human skills may benefit from new opportunities.

The future of employment should therefore not be framed as a contest between humans and machines. The more important question is how humans and AI can work together in ways that improve productivity while protecting employment quality, human dignity, and economic security.

AI does not independently determine the future of work. Its consequences will depend on how employers deploy it, how governments regulate it, how universities educate workers, and how societies distribute its benefits.

A successful AI-driven economy should therefore prioritize **human-AI collaboration, continuous learning, inclusive access to technology, responsible workplace practices, and effective social protection.** The ultimate objective should not be to automate work wherever possible, but to use AI to create a more productive, adaptable, and inclusive labour market.

The future of employment will be shaped not only by what AI **can do**, but by what societies **choose to do with AI.**