



THEIR VIEW

MINT CURATOR

# Getting good jobs for all workers is feasible only in the long haul

Designing effective employment policies for a segmented labour market is a challenge that India must do all it can to meet



**SUDIPTO MUNDLE**  
is chairman, Centre for Development Studies.



Employment growth is now a policy priority following the revealed voter impatience with limited opportunities for jobs and decent livelihoods in the May elections. It is an important theme of the budget. In my last *Mint* column (30 August 2024), I underlined the importance of the finance minister recognizing the need for an employment linked incentive (ELI) scheme and making allocations for it. However, I also noted that the problem of tardy employment growth cannot be solved by allocating money for schemes, unless these are based on a clear understanding of the nature of the problem, which is actually quite complex. This column discusses the complex structure of India's segmented labour market and the interventions required to make growth more employment-intensive in the short-term and over the long haul.

An economy can be segmented in different ways. The standard distinction is among the three major production sectors: agriculture, industry and services. Another frequent segmentation is between the organized sector, also called the formal or modern sector, and the unorganized, informal or traditional sector. In India, the organized sector broadly comprises all government institutions (including autonomous ones), all public enterprises, all private enterprises registered with the ministry of corporate affairs or under the Factories Act or Shops and Establishments Acts in the states, and cooperatives. All other enterprises, including farm households and non-farm household enterprises, constitute the unorganized sector.

Another way of segmenting the economy is through the lens of employment. The *India Employment Report, 2024*, indicates that the country's formal sector employs about 20% of the workforce, with 80% employed in the informal sector. However, only half the formal sector employment, about 10%, features employees who are formally employed with written contracts, regular wages and other benefits. The other half of employment even in the formal sector is actually informal employment (as in casual wage labour). Thus, 90% of total employment in the country is informal employment.

Employment can also be segmented by quality into three broad segments. The best is regular wage employment at an average monthly remuneration of ₹20,702, which accounts for about 22% of employment as per the 2023-24 Periodic Labour Force Survey. The worst is daily-wage casual employment at an estimated monthly income (21 days) of ₹8,962 per month, which accounts for 20% of employment. Self-employment, at an average monthly income of ₹10,032, accounts for India's largest share of employment at 58%.

Designing employment promoting schemes for

this complex structure is very challenging. Clearly, the goal is to maximize well-paid, high-productivity formal employment. However, with 90% of current employment being informal, that goal is still decades away.

Meanwhile, it is urgent to maximize employment growth, even if it is not the best quality of employment, in labour-intensive, large-employment sectors. Outside agriculture, which employs nearly half the workforce but at very low productivity, there are 21 labour-intensive sectors, employing at least 20 persons per ₹1 crore of output, according to a 2022 NCAER study by Bhandari, Kumar and Sahu. Of these, 10 broad sectors are of special interest, as they are already large employers with growing demand: construction; trade; land transport; education and research; textiles and garments; food and beverages; hotels and restaurants; other services; and paper products, printing, publishing and miscellaneous manufacturing.

In the short-term, an ELI scheme which links incentive grants to additional employment can be targeted at a few sub-sectors of these 10 broad sectors. Cost reduction through ELI provisions would further push their growth. Since informal employment accounts for 90% of all employment at present, an ELI scheme for hard-to-reach groups will not be possible without an Aadhaar-like platform for aggregating these groups. This would be a hugely ambitious programme. However, if it could be done for Aadhaar, it can be done again. Indeed,

it can now piggyback on the Aadhaar data base.

Alongside the ELI scheme, a parallel initiative is required to gradually shift the structure of employment from low-paid, low-productivity informal employment towards high-skill, high-productivity, well-paid formal employment. Modern, complex manufacturing industries with strong backward and forward linkages should be the focus of this programme, and an effective skilling scheme should be the key to this initiative.

Hardly 4% of India's workforce has any certified skills, compared to over 70% in most European countries and over 90% in some East Asian economies. Numerous skilling programmes launched over the years have had little impact on actual employment because potential employers, who know what skill gaps need to be filled, have not been involved at the core of these efforts. A new programme announced in the budget that will subsidize apprenticeship in large companies in the organized sector sounds promising. Whether these companies will register with the government to participate in this programme, however, remains to be seen.

Finally, this forward-looking programme should focus on preparing India's workforce for the three fundamental technological revolutions that will shape the emerging global economy: the energy transformation, bio-technology revolution and the Artificial Intelligence (AI) revolution. It is encouraging as I write these lines that an apprenticeship programme for AI has just been launched.

# Trump's new offer to 'protect' women is aimed at fragile men

It's a promise that might find some appeal among insecure males



**NIA-MALIKA HENDERSON**  
is a politics and policy columnist for Bloomberg Opinion.



US presidential candidate Donald Trump said he'll be a "protector" of women REUTERS

Former US President Donald Trump, running against a strong and confident woman, is facing a historic gender gap. And as he tries to dig himself out of this 21-point hole, he is flailing and likely making his problems much worse. He has turned to all-caps screeds on social media, painting a dystopic present that he alone can undo. At rallies, he makes his appeal to "the great women of our country" who he claims are "more stressed and depressed and unhappy... and are less optimistic and confident in the future than they were four years ago." He is here to save them.

"I believe I will fix all of that and fast and at long last, this... national nightmare will end. It will end. We gotta end this national nightmare because I am your protector. I wanna be your protector. As president, I have to be your protector," he said at a rally Monday in Indiana, Pennsylvania. "You will no longer be abandoned, lonely or scared. You will no longer be in danger. You will no longer have anxiety from all of the problems our country has today. You will be protected, and I will be your protector." (Yes, Beyonce has a song called *Protector* on her excellent *Couboy Carter* album where she sings to her children, "I will be your protector, born to be your protector.")

Trump notably doesn't promise high-paying jobs and a career path, but offers lower grocery prices, because we know who does the grocery shopping in Trump's version of America.

The former president, it turns out, is running to be the nation's great father and husband. Who needs policy when you have patriarchy? And so Trump, slowed by age, is running now on sheer muscle, backed by Hulk Hogan, Elon Musk and JD Vance, whose troubled childhood seems to have left him longing for the 1950s ideal, even as his wife's academic accolades easily outshine his. Trump's appeal to women is also a direct appeal to men, whose fragile masculinity requires even more fragile women.

In a country where women earn high school, college and graduate degrees at a higher rate than men, Trump has marvelled that men allow their wives to travel and attend his rallies without them. He has said that world leaders will treat Harris, current vice-president and formerly a US senator and attorney general of California, "like a play toy."

"They look at her and they say we can't believe we got so lucky. They're gonna walk all over her," he said in an interview with *Fox News*'s Laura Ingraham in July. "I don't want to say as to why, but a lot of people understand it."

But the "play thing" turned out to be Trump, who Harris appeared to walk all over in a 90-minute debate, calling him unserious and easily manipulated by the strongmen he admires.

In contrast to his prior runs, Trump is largely a man alone, with few high-profile women surrogates. His wife, Melania, who played an aspirational role for some men and women, has largely been absent, hawking a coffee table book. The former first lady couldn't even be bothered to speak at his nominating convention. His daughter, Ivanka, is also not a factor, depriving him of the visuals of being the patriarch of loving family, particularly of a successful daughter who spouts feminist platitudes about working women. Absent too is Kellyanne Conway, whose presence once absolved Trump of his coarseness, softening him for some women voters.

The most notable surrogate might be Arkansas Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders, who attacked Harris for not birthing children—Harris is a step-mother and part of a blended family, like millions of other women in America.

A question worth asking is whether Harris could have ascended to this level had she married and had kids in her 30s, like many women, whose careers are often derailed as a result.

The proximate cause of Trump's latest and boldest and most sexist attempts to attract women voters is the matter of abortion rights, an issue which Trump has tried to treat like a mere legislative shift rather than a medical nightmare that has caused the deaths of at least two women, and likely many more. "Women will be happy, healthy, confident and free," Trump said at his rally. "You will no longer be thinking about abortion."

That is Trump's great hope. That abortion and the millions of people who value reproductive rights and equality and freedom won't doom his third run for the White House.

For decades, there were stereotypes of how women leaders would behave on the job. Surely, they would be addled by oestrogen and ovaries and given to fits of hysteria and whining, beset by Chicken Little fears and bouts of unbridled emotion and paranoia, and therefore, unfit to lead. This view is still around. ©BLOOMBERG

GUEST VIEW

# India has an opportunity to shape the future of telecom

HEMENDRA K. SHARMA



is deputy director general (media), department of telecommunications, ministry of communications, Government of India.

India's leadership in the telecommunications sector is set to reach a new height as it prepares to host the World Telecommunication Standardization Assembly (WTSA) from 15 October to 24 October in New Delhi. This is the first time that this event, organized by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), is being held in the Asia Pacific. Representatives from over 190 countries will convene to shape the future of global telecom standards. It will serve as a platform to discuss next-generation technologies like 6G (sixth generation telecom).

**What are the ITU and WTSA?** Established in 1865, the ITU is a United Nations agency focused on telecom standardization. Its mission is to ensure seamless global information exchange by creating international standards for communication systems. The WTSA is an event held every four years, offering a forum for member countries to collaborate on setting technical rules that guide the development of future telecom technologies. India's hosting of WTSA 2024

gives the country an opportunity to play a key role in shaping the global telecom agenda, especially as we look towards 6G and beyond.

**Telecom standardization is important:** Telecom standards form the backbone of global connectivity. They ensure that different devices, networks and systems communicate smoothly across borders. For example, international roaming agreements rely on shared standards and enabling seamless communication, while keeping costs low. Similarly, telecom standards govern global dialling codes and fibre-optic cables, making communication across the globe easier and more reliable.

From a business perspective, standardization is essential to foster competition and innovation. It helps make telecom services more accessible and affordable for billions of people. Standards allow diverse equipment and systems to work together, boosting the efficiency and reach of networks.

Standardization is more than just a technical requirement; it's a strategic tool. Countries that influence global telecom standards have the power to shape emerging technologies and protect their commercial interests. For businesses, adhering to global standards opens up international market opportuni-

ties while ensuring fair competition.

Union communications minister Jyotiraditya Scindia's statement that "India followed the world in 4G, is marching alongside in 5G, and will lead in 6G" captures the country's confidence and aligns with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of transforming India into a global exporter of telecom technology from being just a large consumer.

India now boasts of nearly 100% 4G coverage and is rapidly expanding its 5G infrastructure, covering more than 600,000 villages and establishing over 442,000 5G Base Transceiver Stations (BTS). India is also taking strides towards 6G, with more than 250 international patents under its belt. These advancements meet rising demand for faster data speeds, reduced latency and expanded network coverage.

**India's role in global telecom for the Global South:** India's leadership in the telecom sector extends beyond innovation. It includes advocacy on behalf of developing nations.

Many countries in the Global South face challenges like low internet penetration and high infrastructure costs. India's success in rolling out 4G and 5G services even in rural areas offers a model for others to follow. For example, the 5G standard, an Indian innovation, was created to make 5G more accessible in underserved regions. Recognized globally by the ITU, 5G shows how standardization can bridge gaps and bring the benefits of advanced telecommunications to all.

By championing standards that address the needs of developing nations, India ensures that global telecom policies become more inclusive. As the world moves towards 6G, it is important for developing countries to be part of these conversations to ensure they benefit from upcoming technologies.

**WTSA 2024 will be a global telecom milestone:** It will be more than a gathering of global delegates. It will include side-events like the India Mobile Congress (IMC), where leading telecom companies and innovators

will highlight advancements in 5G, 6G and digital solutions. Sessions led by the Network of Women in ITU Standardization will highlight women's leadership in the digital tech industry and role in shaping standards.

Technological innovation will also be spotlighted through events like AI for Good Impact India, focusing on the role of artificial intelligence (AI) in sustainable development, and the Robotics for Good Youth Challenge, where young innovators will compete to create robotic solutions for disaster response.

The WTSA Expo will also display industry-leading services. The ITU Bridging the Standardization Gap programme will assist small and medium-sized enterprises in developing countries. There will be other events too. By hosting WTSA 2024, India can consolidate its role in shaping the future of telecommunications. Indian efforts are aimed at ensuring that telecom services become more affordable, accessible and innovative worldwide. India's involvement in setting 6G standards will also be good for the telecom industry, helping sustain its drive to be inclusive and modern.

Remember, the basic aim of telecom standardization is to have the benefits of modern advancements reach people everywhere.