JustJobs NETWORK

Supported by JPMorganChase

Path to Progress

Enabling a Smooth Education-to-Employment Transition for India's Youth

Sabina Dewan, Isha Gupta and Aditya Prem Kumar

March 2026

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Glossary

DST	Dual System of Training
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GIF	Generation India Foundation
ITI	Industrial Training Institute
LAHI	Lend A Hand India
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
NEP	National Education Policy
OJT	On-the-Job Training
PARFI	PanIIT Alumni Foundation
PLFS	Periodic Labour Force Survey
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
UDISE	Unified District Information System for Education

Photo: JustJobs Network (PanIIT Alumni Foundation field visit)

Contents

Executive Summary

India is home to the world's largest youth population—approximately 370 million young people aged 15–29—a demographic advantage that should be driving economic growth and competitiveness. Yet this potential remains largely unrealised. Many of India's youth remain disengaged from productive activity, with one in four not in education, employment,, or training.[1] Of those looking for work, many struggle to find good quality jobs. This is at the same time that employers report persistent difficulty in finding skilled workers. These facts point to a significant loss of human and economic potential at a time when India could be leveraging its large and growing youth population to fuel transformative growth.

Why This Matters

This is not merely a youth issue but a broader economic challenge with far-reaching consequences. India faces a projected skill deficit of 47-49 million workers by 2027, risking US$2 trillion in GDP losses over the next decade.[2] Only 54 percent of youth in higher education are deemed employable by industry standards.[3]

The education-to-employment pathway breaks down at multiple points, creating a cumulative disadvantage. An **information gap** leaves young people making consequential education and training decisions without reliable guidance. This leads them down tracks that are misaligned with their aptitudes or labour market demand. A **skills gap** emerges as vocational training institutions struggle with obsolete equipment, outdated curricula, and inadequately prepared trainers, while students arrive with weak foundational literacy and numeracy, and lack critical workplace skills like communication and teamwork. An **experience gap** results from broken linkages between educational institutions and employers. Most training institutes lack systematic employer partnerships and their input into the curriculum, leaving students without practical experience or realistic workplace expectations.

What This Report Offers

This report combines extensive knowledge of India's education and training systems with a deep understanding of the country's labour market to identify actionable solutions grounded in field evidence. It is based on research with several stakeholders across India. Drawing from the ground-level interventions of seven non-profit partners working with JPMorganChase, this report distils replicable, system-level insights on ways to advance youth employment in India.

Integrated, systems-level impact:

Addressing certain key gaps simultaneously produces transformative results; in essence, the sum is greater than its parts. Isolated reforms deliver limited gains, while coordinated action across career guidance, demand mapping, employability skills, industry partnerships, trainer development, and community engagement creates systemic change that fundamentally improves education-to-employment outcomes. Beyond this report, the next step in this programme is to engage with multiple state governments to enable the adoption of what works to create a bridge between civil society innovation and public sector scale.

Local-level implementation:

Effective demand mapping and career guidance must operate at the local level to succeed. Generic national or state-level insights about "growing sectors" have consistently failed to improve training outcomes. Based on the projects studied, we find that granular, local labour market intelligence—identifying specific employers, roles, and skill needs within defined geographic areas—enables training institutions to align programmes with actual opportunities, which improves placement quality and retention.

Transferable skills for dynamic labour markets:

The emphasis on employability skills reflects a fundamental shift in how skills development must respond to rapidly changing work environments. Today's youth will change occupations multiple times in their lifetimes. Technical competencies alone are insufficient. Transferable skills—communication, adaptability, problem-solving, and collaboration—enable workers to navigate transitions, learn new roles, and maintain employment security in evolving labour markets. This forward-looking approach moves beyond static skills training to build adaptive capacity for long-term resilience.

Key Levers for Change

The report identifies six interdependent levers to strengthen India's education-to-employment pathway. The examples that follow show how these reforms are being implemented by local organisations supported by JPMorganChase.

1. Align skills training to local demand:

Institutionalise regular, systematic tracking of available work, emerging sectors, and needed skills at the local level, feeding this intelligence directly to training institutions and career counsellors. Skill provision should be guided by local hiring realities by identifying key employers, roles, and skill needs at the regional level, then aggregating this data into state and national assessments. This intelligence should directly inform the trades and courses offered, seat capacities, geographic distribution of programmes, and subsequent curriculum design.

Medha implements a model demonstrating this approach on the ground through district-level demand mapping, using this intelligence to facilitate structured programmes between Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs), polytechnics, and industry partners. This approach institutionalises collaboration for the Dual System of Training (DST),[4] enabling on-the-job training (OJT), industry exposure, and placement pathways aligned with local hiring demand.

Similarly, **Generation India Foundation** (GIF) designs short-term training programmes explicitly around employer demand. They map demand and use it to determine the trades offered and the seat capacity for each trade, while working with employers to shape the curriculum.

2. Embed comprehensive career guidance throughout the education-to-employment continuum:

Structured and continuous career counselling from middle school onwards provides students with timely exposure to industry professionals, successful role models, and current information about emerging opportunities and career paths. Importantly, this guidance must reflect local employment realities rather than broad sector narratives.

Antarang Foundation integrates a four-year Comprehensive Career Education curriculum across Grades 9–12 in government schools. Their model is locally contextualised, with career counselling grounded in local labour market realities. Students move from early career awareness to exposure visits, exploring different career options in depth, and receiving structured support for post-school transitions. The programme also includes systematic engagement with parents to strengthen informed decision-making at home.

Avanti Fellows embeds structured preparation, mentorship, and exam readiness for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM)-related occupations within schools and underserved communities. Through guided academic support, problem-solving pedagogy, and alumni mentoring, the programme helps students access competitive higher education pathways that would otherwise remain out of reach.

3. Integrate employability skills in the core curriculum:

Workplace-ready skills such as communication, teamwork, professional conduct, problem-solving, and digital literacy are essential capacities that must be an integral part of training, not optional electives. This requires dedicated employability skills instructors, building the capacity of trainers, and clear assessment frameworks. The foundation for employability skills should begin earlier by integrating life skills at the secondary schooling level, creating a developmental continuum that prepares students for the workplace well before they enter formal employment.

In partnership with the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, **Quest Alliance** supports the implementation of an employability skills curriculum across ITIs. They work to embed employability skills in formal training pathways.

4. Strengthen partnerships between industry and skills training institutions:

Create systematic, formal collaboration between education and training institution and employers, through internships, apprenticeships, structured industry engagement, and employer input into curriculum design. **PanIIT Alumni Foundation** (PARFI) operates a demand-linked skills and placement model that integrates employer engagement with candidate preparation. PARFI works directly with employers to define job roles, skills standards, and geographic placement requirements before training begins.

Lend A Hand India (LAHI), embeds vocational education within secondary schools and builds local employer networks to provide structured student internships.

5. Strengthen trainer capacity:

Regularise structured, continuous training for all instructors—such as trade trainers, placement officers, and employability skills facilitators—focusing on both pedagogical innovations and industry-aligned technical knowledge.

JPMorganChase has supported partners that focus on strengthening instructor capacity within public systems. **Quest Alliance** does this by training faculty to deliver structured employability skills curricula, while providing ongoing technical support and mentoring. **Medha** builds institutional and trainer capacity to implement a DST, including coordination with industry partners.

6. Engage with parents and communities to raise awareness and garner support:

Structured parent counselling, community workshops, and awareness campaigns can challenge any stigma around skills-based education. To this end, families and communities should be mobilised as active partners in education and career decisions, particularly for students from disadvantaged backgrounds and young women facing restrictive social norms.

Antarang Foundation integrates structured parent engagement during key transition years to support informed career planning. **GIF** conducts parent orientations to clarify employment pathways and earning potential. **PARFI** engages with families in the post-placement period, particularly when young women enter formal employment, to strengthen sustained workforce participation.

The Way Forward

The interventions highlighted in this report reflect that stronger education-to-employment pathways are both possible and achievable. Civil society organisations are working to address significant gaps in the education and training systems and are demonstrating results. The challenge is no longer proving what works; it is scaling working solutions system-wide through coordinated partnerships between government, industry, training institutions, and civil society. Institutional commitment and sustained partnerships can transform these tried-and-tested approaches into systematic practice to unlock the potential of India's youth.

Photo: JustJobs Network (PanIIT Alumni Foundation field visit)

Introduction

India is home to the world's largest youth population—approximately 370 million young people aged 15-29[5]—a demographic advantage that should be driving economic growth and competitiveness. Yet this potential remains largely unrealised.

A large section of India's youth remains disengaged from productive activity, with one in four not in education, employment, or training.[6] Of those looking for work, many struggle to find good quality jobs. This is at the same time that employers report persistent difficulty in finding skilled workers. The coexistence of youth looking for productive work alongside unmet employer demand points to a structural disconnect—not simply a shortage of jobs, but weaknesses in how the system prepares, guides, and transitions young people into work.

All of this amounts to a significant loss of human and economic potential at a time when India could be leveraging its large and growing youth population to fuel transformative growth. This challenge carries significant economic consequences. India faces a projected skill deficit of 47–49 million workers by 2027, risking US$2 trillion in GDP losses over the next decade.[7] Only 54 percent of youth in higher education are deemed employable by industry standards.[8]

The education-to-employment pathway breaks down at multiple points, creating a cumulative disadvantage. An **information gap** leaves young people making consequential education and training decisions without reliable guidance, often pursuing pathways misaligned with their aptitudes or labour market demand. A **skills gap** emerges as vocational training institutions struggle with obsolete equipment, outdated curricula, and inadequately prepared trainers, while students arrive with weak foundational literacy and numeracy skills and lack critical workplace abilities, such as communication and teamwork. An **experience gap** persists due to broken linkages between educational institutions and industry, with most training institutes lacking systematic employer partnerships or curriculum input, leaving students without practical experience or realistic workplace expectations.

JPMorganChase recognised many of these challenges early and has been investing in non-profit organisations experimenting with ways to address these bottlenecks. This report examines the work of seven non-profits supported by JPMorganChase to highlight the ground-level interventions that are most salient in easing the education-to-employment transition for India's youth. This research also aims to facilitate partnerships with state governments to enable the adoption of what works to create a bridge between civil society innovation and public sector scale.

The report combines an understanding of India's labour market, education, and training systems with extensive primary research, including consultations with diverse stakeholders across multiple states.[9] This work is informed by an analysis of various national datasets.

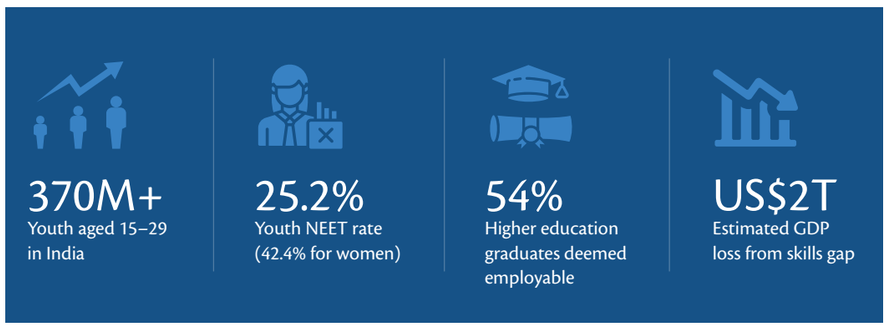
Based on this research, the report identifies six actions that can smoothen the journey from education to employment for India's youth.

1. Identify opportunities in the local market and align skills training to what is in demand locally.
2. Embed comprehensive career guidance throughout the education-to-employment continuum.
3. Integrate employability skills—defined as the skills, knowledge and competencies that enhance a worker's ability to secure, retain and progress in employment and adapt to change[10]—in the core curriculum.
4. Strengthen partnerships between industry and skills training institutions.
5. Strengthen trainer capacity.
6. Engage with parents and communities to raise awareness and garner support.

Some of these recommendations align with those in the National Education Policy 2020, (NEP 2020), but this report details how to operationalise the recommendations and put provisions into action. This research documents operational models that translate policy intent into practice, establishing evidence-based pathways from successful pilot interventions to system-wide adoption.

The research underscores that taking action on all these fronts simultaneously produces transformative results; in essence, sum is greater than its parts. Isolated reforms deliver limited gains, while coordinated action across career guidance, demand mapping, employability skills, industry partnerships, trainer development, and community engagement creates systemic change that fundamentally improves education-to-employment outcomes.

The report is organised as follows. Section 2 presents the current state of youth education, skills training, and employment using national data. Section 3 introduces the education-to-employment framework and maps challenges across each stage of the pathway. Section 4 identifies key levers for reform based on field evidence and implementation experience. Section 5 concludes with targeted recommendations to strengthen coordination, improve employment outcomes, and support sustained workforce participation.



The Data: Where the Transition Breaks Down

India has made genuine progress expanding access to education—primary enrolment is near-universal and average years of schooling for youth aged 15–29 years exceeded 10 years for the first time in 2022.[11] But expansion in access has not been matched by an improvement in the transition into work. More education is not producing better employment outcomes, because the mechanisms that move young people from one stage to the next—and ultimately into productive, lasting work—remain weak.

The data reveals three structural breaks in the pipeline.

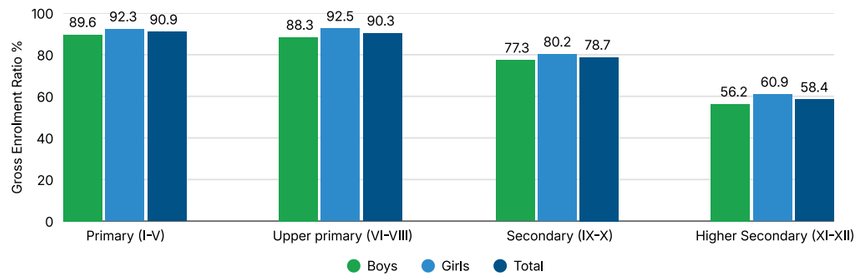
Secondary School: The First Exit Point

Many students drop out of school when transitioning out of Grade 8, never joining secondary school (Grade 9). The number of young people dropping out between Grades 10 and 11 is even higher.[12] This has serious implications because these transition points determine whether young people remain on pathways leading to higher education, formal employment, and structured skilling, and early exit significantly increases the risk of long-term informality, low wages, and economic vulnerability.

Enrolment declines sharply from primary school (Grades 1–5) to higher secondary school (Grades 11–12).[13] Over 11 percent of students drop out before completing secondary school (Grades 9–10), with the figure rising significantly among socially and economically disadvantaged communities.[14] Economic pressure is the dominant driver: over half of male students aged 14–15 who do not attend school cite the need to supplement household income. This share significantly increases with age. For girls, domestic responsibilities account for about 60 percent of non-attendance.[15]

Figure 1

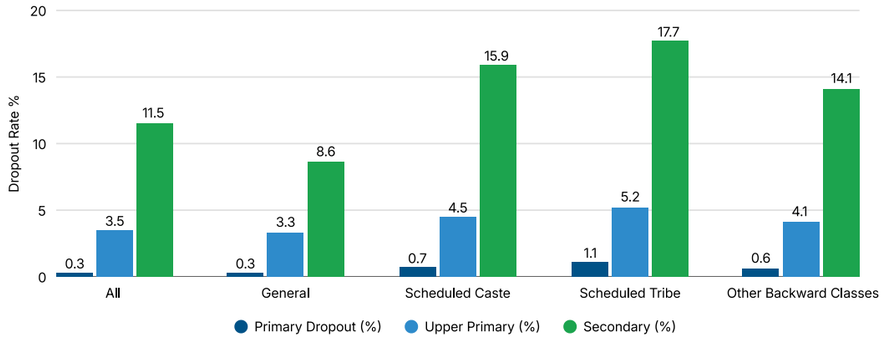
Gross enrolment ratio by education level (2024–25)



Source: UDISE 2024–25

Figure 2

Dropout rate by social category (2024–25)



Source: UDISE 2024–25

Post-Secondary: Credentials Without Pathways

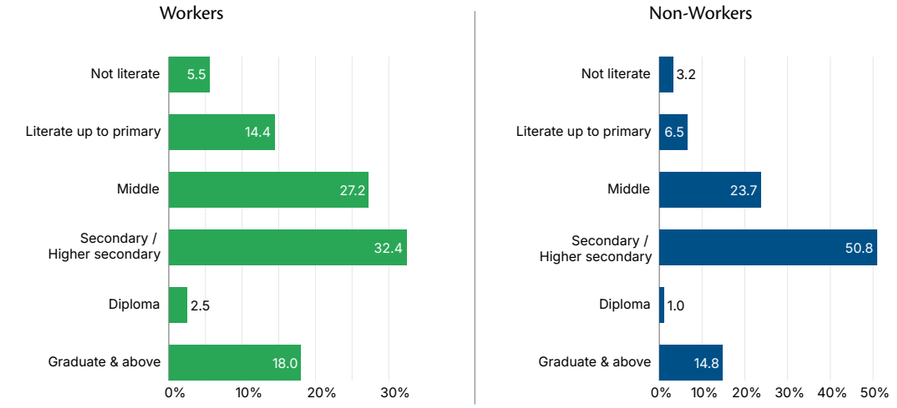
One striking finding in the data is that the largest share of non-working youth—young people who are currently neither employed nor actively participating in the labour market—are educated, having completed secondary or higher secondary school. Half of all non-working youth (50.8 percent) have passed Grade 10 or Grade 12.[16] However, having a school certificate is not enough to get a job.

The problem is even more pronounced when looking only at those actively seeking work: among diploma holders, unemployment stands at 17.7 percent, while among graduates, it rises to 27 percent, meaning more than one in four young graduates are unable to find jobs despite completing higher education.[17]

These numbers are important because they reveal a dual challenge: a large portion of youth are disengaged from the labour market altogether, while even those who are educated and actively seeking work face significant barriers.

Figure 3

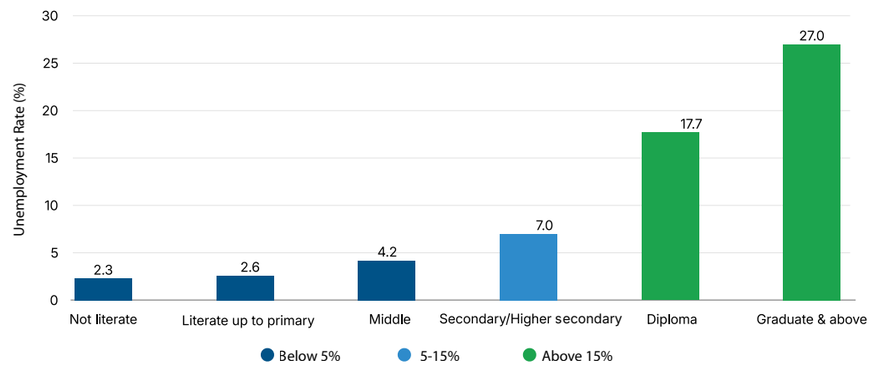
Education level of working vs non-working youth (2023–24)



Source: PLFS 2023–24

Figure 4

Youth unemployment rate by education level (2024)



Source: PLFS 2023–24

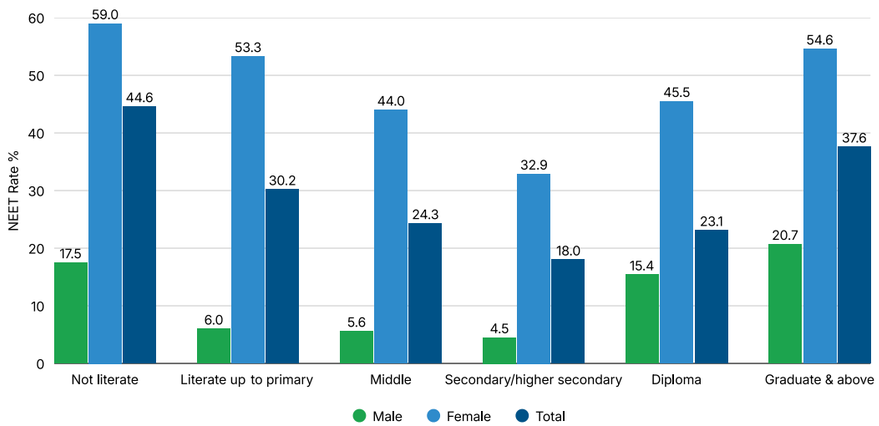
The NEET Paradox and the Gender Crisis

The rate of young people not in education, employment or training—or the NEET rate—rises sharply after post-secondary education reaching 23.1 percent for diploma holders and 37.6 percent for graduates.[18] These are educated youth who have invested substantially in their qualifications, yet many are neither working nor pursuing further training. This highlights a significant mismatch between educational attainment and labour market opportunities.

Gender compounds every stage of this story. Young women are more than five times more likely than young men to be NEET—42.4 percent compared to 7.9 percent overall. Even among graduates, more than half of young women (54.6 percent) are NEET, compared to 20.7 percent of men.[19] These figures reflect layered constraints: household responsibilities, safety concerns, employer biases, and workplace conditions that make retention difficult.

Figure 5

NEET rates by education level and gender (2023–24)



Source: PLFS 2023–24

46.5% Youth labour force participation (total)

28.8% Female labour force participation

27% Graduate unemployment rate

42.4% Female NEET rate vs 7.9% male

Challenges in the Journey from Education to Employment

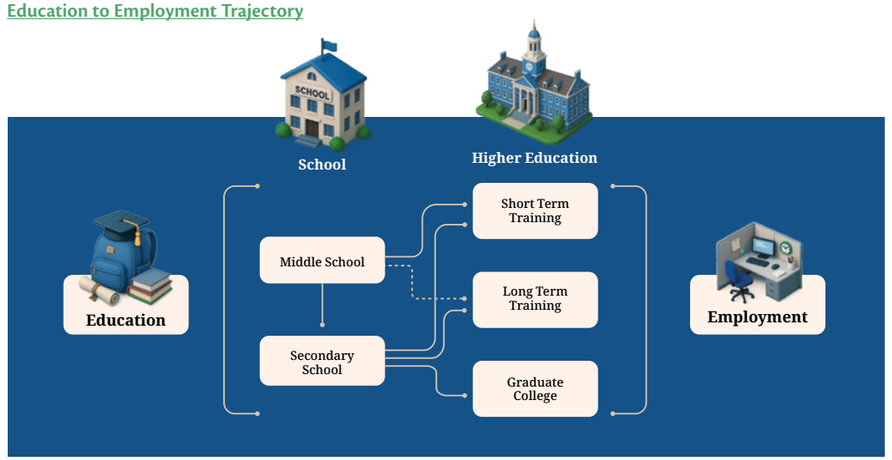
The challenges young people face accumulate over time. A student who leaves school without strong foundational skills and with poor awareness of career options enters vocational training at a disadvantage. A trainee who completes a technically sound programme but has never interacted with an employer finds it hard to find a job. A worker who lacks post-placement support exits the formal workforce at the first difficulty.

Stage 1- School Education: The Foundation Gap

At the school level, the breakdown begins primarily as an **information gap**. Most schools provide limited structured support for career guidance, life skills, or workplace exposure. In fieldwork at a rural secondary school in Maharashtra, students named doctor,

The school years are where aspirations form, habits develop, and the first critical educational choices are made. But for most students in India, school provides limited support for any of these decisions. Career guidance is rare, life skills are not formally taught, and vocational subjects reach fewer than 5 percent of schools.

Education to Employment Trajectory



engineer, and civil servant as their top ambitions, but could not describe the academic requirements for any of these careers. This pattern is not confined to rural settings. It reflects a systemic absence of structured career guidance and planning across much of the school system.

Students from low-income families face an additional layer of adversity: unequal access to competitive exam preparation. Private coaching for engineering and medical entrance examinations has become the de facto route to India's most sought-after institutions, but it is inaccessible to most government school students. Meanwhile, vocational education—a national policy priority—reaches fewer than 5 percent of schools against a target of 50 percent,[20] held back by the absence of qualified trainers, inadequate equipment, and weak institutional coordination.

Social stigma around skills-based pathways means that even where vocational subjects exist, students face resistance from families who do not view vocational education in the same manner as the non-vocational track.[21] For girls, the constraints are sharper: family pressure to scale back ambitions, limited access to digital devices, and the absence of gender sensitisation in classrooms.[22]

Stage 2- Higher Education and Skills Training: The Skills and Experience Gap

In higher education and vocational institutes, the breakdown deepens into a combined **skills gap and experience gap**, rooted in earlier information deficits.

In vocational training institutes, trainers consistently report that incoming students struggle with basic literacy and numeracy, forcing remedial teaching that reduces the time available for trade-specific training. Many students enroll in vocational programmes not as an informed choice but as a fallback, with no genuine interest in the trade, reducing motivation and increasing dropout.

Technical competence, where it is built, is not matched by preparation for the workplace. Placement officers note that technically strong candidates are often rejected at interviews, not due to a lack of ability but for their inability to communicate clearly or present themselves professionally. Curriculum relevance is a persistent structural problem; for instance, a trainer in an architectural draughtsmanship course described an employer complaint that students were using obsolete measurement techniques because the curriculum had not been updated and there was no formal feedback channel connecting employers to curriculum-setting bodies. Equipment across many institutes is outdated or non-functional. Trainers lack regular upskilling opportunities, and high-performing staff lose motivation in the absence of recognition. Women account for only 6.6 percent of ITI enrolments and 15.8 percent of instructors.[23]

In degree colleges, the same structural gaps appear with less institutional attention. Most colleges lack placement cells comparable to those in technical institutes, career guidance is informal or absent, and students graduate without internship experience or employer networks.

Stage 3- Employment: The Attrition Problem

Gaps in **experience and information carry over into the employment stage,** resulting in attrition issues (workers not staying in jobs for long).

For many young people, early employment is where the transition most visibly breaks down—not through unemployment, but through early exit. Field evidence from Haryana showed that fewer than 30 percent of placed students completed 12 months of employment. Students leave when assigned work bears no resemblance to what was promised, when wages fall below expectations, or when working conditions are unsafe. Basic entitlements—health insurance, retirement savings contributions (Provident Fund), and safety equipment—are largely absent. Most training institutions have no system for following up with students after placement, meaning early workplace difficulties go unaddressed, resulting in attrition.

In addition to engaging with families to garner support, promoting the retention of and reducing employment attrition rates among women entails fostering better working conditions. For example, an electronics assembly company in Bengaluru provided women's washrooms, a female floor manager, and a grievance mechanism. The company retained a large majority of the women it hired, even when other better-paying options became available.

Students who progress to technical training institutes and degree colleges arrive carrying the gaps from school: weak foundational skills, limited career clarity, and underdeveloped interpersonal abilities. The institutions they enter often lack the resources, industry connections, and staff capacity to fully close these gaps.

For young women who relocate for work, family pressure, often motivated by concern for their safety, is one of the most common reasons for early exit. Programmes that engage families before and during placement see significantly better retention outcomes, suggesting that information and expectation management extend beyond the individual student to the household.

Key Levers for Change

The field evidence points to six interconnected areas where investment and reform produce greatest improvements to education-to-employment outcomes. These levers work best when activated together; a young person supported by all six has fundamentally different employment prospects than one supported by any in isolation. What follows provides the operational detail of how each lever is being made to work in practice, grounded in the experience of JPMorganChase's seven non-profit partners.

LEVER 1: Identify Opportunities in the Local Market and Align Skills Training to What is in Demand

What It Is and Why It Matters

The most common failure in India's skilling system is not a lack of training capacity, but a lack of alignment between what is taught and what employers actually want. Skill provision should be guided by local hiring realities rather than supply-side planning. This means institutionalising the regular, systematic tracking of available work, emerging sectors, and needed skills at the local level, and feeding that intelligence directly to training institutions and career counsellors.

The intelligence gathered should directly inform which trades and courses are offered, seat capacities, the geographic distribution of programmes, and curriculum design. Generic national or state-level insights about "growing sectors" have consistently failed to improve training outcomes. What works is granular, local intelligence identifying specific employers, roles, and skill needs within defined geographic areas, then aggregating this data into state and national assessments.

How to Operationalise It

Effective demand mapping requires a structured process for gathering and regularly updating employer information. The critical aspect is local specificity because generic national data is not actionable at the school or institute level. Such data must be accessible to all training institutes, schools, and placement officers through a district-level database:

IN PRACTICE:

Medha– Local Employer Mapping and Industry-Institute Partnerships

Medha works with institutes to institutionalise local employer mapping as a routine system practice. District and trade-level employer surveys help institutes build a dynamic database capturing company profiles, locations, relevant trades, hiring capacity, and current vacancies. The database is continuously updated through regular engagement with employers and becomes a shared resource for placement planning, career guidance, and programme decisions. By grounding training choices in local labour market realities, institutes can align skills provision more closely with real employment opportunities.

IN PRACTICE

Generation India Foundation: Matching Training and Employer Demand

GIF integrates jobs and employer engagement from the beginning. They undertake extensive industry analysis to estimate annual entry-level vacancies and confirm a viable target market before launching any short-term course. Its demand mapping operates at multiple levels: GIF's central and regional placement teams analyse industry trends and employer hiring plans to secure pan-India partnerships with potential employers for each job role. These partnerships are then cascaded to regional and district offices to map local vacancies and hiring needs.

At the hyper-local level, GIF's training partners continuously track openings within their local region, supported by its capacity-building efforts. This multi-tiered mapping is completed prior to the launch of each cohort and regularly refreshed to ensure confirmed job opportunities amount to at least 1.5 times the number of enrolled students, giving them a choice in employer and location before training even begins.

LEVER 2: Embed Comprehensive Career Guidance Throughout the Education-to-Employment Continuum

What It Is and Why It Matters

Structured and continuous career counselling from middle school onwards gives students timely exposure to industry professionals, successful role models, and current information about emerging opportunities and career paths. In the Indian context, where most students are first-generation learners with limited exposure to the formal economy, career guidance is not a supplementary service. It is a foundational requirement for making every other part of the system work.

Without it, students choose training programmes they do not understand for careers they have not researched, arrive at placement drives unprepared, and leave jobs because they had no framework for understanding what early career development looks like. Critically, this guidance must reflect local employment realities rather than broad sector narratives grounded in what jobs actually exist near where students live.

How to Operationalise It

The core challenge is embedding guidance into the system rather than running it as an external add-on. This requires three things simultaneously: a structured curriculum of guidance activities mapped to student grades and life stages; trained facilitators—whether dedicated counsellors or existing teachers—who can deliver those activities effectively; and an information backbone of current, local labour market data that makes the guidance specific and credible. Parent engagement is not optional. For most students, parents are the most powerful influence on career decisions. Guidance that does not reach the family rarely reaches the student.

IN PRACTICE

Antarang Foundation: Comprehensive Career Education Model

Antarang Foundation operationalises comprehensive career guidance as a structured four-year intervention embedded within the secondary school timetable for Grades 9–12, aligned to key transition milestones. The curriculum progresses from self-awareness and career exploration in Grade 9, to personalised planning and decision-making support in Grade 10, to employability skills and pathway preparation in Grade 11, and finally to transition execution into higher education, vocational training, entrepreneurship, or employment in Grade 12. Critical transition years include structured one-on-one counselling and focused parent engagement to strengthen informed decision-making when family influence is strongest.

Career exposure is organised across sectors and aligned to local labour market realities through geography-specific, research-backed, and customisable content. Industry partnerships enable career talks, mentorship, workplace visits, and internships, helping students connect aspirations to tangible pathways.

Beyond direct delivery, Antarang partners with state departments and and district education offices through Model Districts to demonstrate measurable transition outcomes and build administrative ownership. Once proof of concept is established, the organisation supports governments to embed career guidance within public school systems by training existing teachers and master trainers.

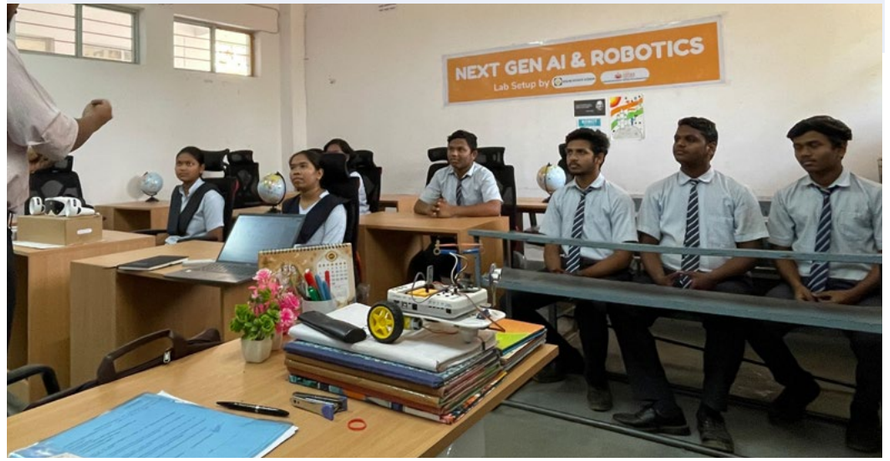
IN PRACTICE

Avanti Fellows: Test Preparation for STEM Transitions

Avanti Fellows embeds structured preparation, mentorship, and exam readiness for the STEM subjects. For students aiming for competitive engineering and medical colleges, career guidance has a specific operational dimension: building awareness of entrance examinations and providing the preparation needed to succeed in them.

Avanti Fellows addresses this with a structured test preparation programme for Grades 11 and 12 students in government schools, providing 12-18 hours of instruction per week through in-person and online delivery. It covers the full Joint Entrance Examination (main and advanced), the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test, the Common University Entrance Test, and various state-level Common Entrance Tests. It covers the relevant syllabi across Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics, and Biology, supported by concept notes, problem banks, weekly tests, and full-length mock examinations.

Avanti Fellows has built an alumni network of over 7,000 members. A number of these alumni remain actively engaged through mentoring and career guidance, and some return to schools to support current students. This continued engagement helps foster a self-sustaining culture of aspiration within government school communities. Formal partnerships with state governments, sometimes with dedicated implementation teams within education departments, signal that competitive exam preparation is a legitimate function of the public school system.



LEVER 3: Integrate Employability Skill in the Core Curriculum

What It Is and Why It Matters

Workplace-ready skills—communication, teamwork, professional conduct, problem-solving, and digital literacy—are essential capacities that must be an integral part of training, not an optional elective course. The evidence from placement drives is consistent: candidates are not rejected for failing technical tests, but for being unable to communicate clearly, answer questions confidently, or present themselves professionally.

There is a deeper argument too: today's young people will change occupations multiple times across their working lives. Transferable capabilities are what sustain employment across such transitions. The foundation for employability skills should begin earlier, with life skills integration in secondary school, creating a developmental continuum that prepares students for workplace expectations well before they enter formal employment.

How to Operationalise It

There should be dedicated employability skills instructors, investment in trainer capacity, and clear assessment frameworks. The operational challenge is delivery quality; the national employability skills curriculum exists, but its implementation is deeply uneven. Effective delivery requires trained facilitators who understand both curriculum content and the activity-based, experiential pedagogical methods that make it work. Lecture-based delivery of employability skills does not build skills like communication. It requires trainer development and integration with placement activity so that students experience the connection between what they are practising and what they will need.

IN PRACTICE

Quest Alliance: Employability Skills in ITIs

In partnership with the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, Quest developed the national employability skills curriculum, a 120-hour programme covering career development, digital literacy, workplace readiness, self-employment, and citizenship. It is now delivered across more than 15,600 ITIs and National Skill Training Institutes, reaching an estimated 2.5 million learners.

Quest supports implementation through two models. In the direct model, a full-time Career Support Assistant works inside institutes, co-teaching with employability skills trainers and demonstrating interactive teaching methods. In the indirect model, Quest provides structured annual training for trainers, placement officers, and principals, followed by continuous mentoring and peer learning support.

LEVER 4: Strengthen Partnerships Between Industry and Skills Training Institutions

What It Is and Why It Matters

Creating systematic, formal collaboration between education and training institutions and employers through internships, apprenticeships, structured industry engagement, and employer input into curriculum design is among the most impactful interventions for improving employment outcomes. Workplace exposure allows students to test skills in real conditions, understand employer expectations, identify gaps in their own preparation, and build the confidence and professional networks that classroom training cannot replicate.

The retention evidence makes an additional case: students employed in roles that match their training and that they chose with a realistic understanding of the work stay in employment significantly longer than those who arrive with no prior workplace exposure.

How to Operationalise It

The primary challenge is coordination. Getting a student into a workplace requires an employer willing to host them, a clear agreement about what the experience involves, a monitoring mechanism, and a way of connecting what happens in the workplace to what is being taught in the classroom. Formalisation is essential, informal arrangements collapse when individual relationships change. State coordination is a critical accelerant: where government departments establish formal frameworks with operational guidelines, monitoring systems, and financial support, adoption is significantly higher.

IN PRACTICE

PanIIT Alumni Foundation: Demand-led industry partnership

PARFI follows a demand-led industry–institute partnership anchored in an assured placement model, integrating employer engagement directly into training design. Employers are engaged upfront to define job roles, skill standards, and geographic placement needs, ensuring training maps directly to hiring demand. Industry partnerships are managed through signed memoranda of understanding and structured touchpoints, including on-the-job training (OJT), internships, guest lectures, and workshops.

IN PRACTICE

Lend A Hand India: School Internship Programme

LAHI works to integrate vocational education into the mainstream secondary school system, enabling students to gain practical exposure and stronger connections to the world of work.

A key component of this approach is the School Internship Programme. LAHI supports students in Grades 11 and 12 to undertake an 80-hour internship with local businesses, such as grocery stores, healthcare units, cafes, garages, workshops, and small manufacturers. The focus is on workplace socialisation: communication, punctuality, teamwork, and professional responsibility through direct work exposure.

In schools where LAHI works directly, the organisation leads employer mapping, student matching, and onboarding. In indirect schools, trainers are equipped through a training-of-trainers programme to conduct employer engagement independently. Increasingly, students themselves identify potential employers in their communities. LAHI has also developed a monitoring system tracking the internship status for each student, a system that is now operated directly by a few state government departments.

IN PRACTICE

Medha: Dual System of Training

Medha works with government ITIs to operationalise the DST as a structured model of institute–industry collaboration. Within the model, students divide their training time between classroom instruction and supervised workplace learning with an industry partner, enabling practical exposure alongside formal training. Institutes and employers operate under clearly defined processes that specify training roles, workplace learning expectations, and mechanisms for monitoring student progress.

Joint committees comprising institute leadership, trade instructors, and industry representatives meet regularly to review implementation challenges and ensure alignment between training and workplace requirements. To enable sustained participation, institutes are supported in formalising partnerships with employers through memoranda of understanding that clarify responsibilities and create stable arrangements for work-based learning. These structured partnerships allow institutes to institutionalise workplace exposure while ensuring that training delivery remains connected to real industry practices and employer expectations.

LEVER 5: Strengthen Trainer Capacity

What It Is and Why It Matters

Trainers are the central delivery mechanism for every other lever. The quality of career guidance, employability skills delivery, technical instruction, and placement support depend on the people responsible for them. When trainer development is inadequate, every other investment in the system underperforms.

Regularising structured, ongoing training for all instructors—trade trainers, placement officers, and employability skills facilitators—with a focus on both pedagogical innovation and industry-aligned technical knowledge is essential. The challenges are specific: trainers working from knowledge acquired years ago without structured opportunities to update it; pedagogical gaps that lead to a lecture-based delivery of skills that only develop through practice; and motivation challenges in systems that provide no formal recognition for high performance.

How to Operationalise It

Effective trainer development is a planned, recurring cycle, not a one-time event. Initial training gives trainers the knowledge and methods they need. Ongoing support through peer learning groups, mentoring, and follow-up helps them apply what they have learned. Periodic refresher training keeps knowledge current. Assessment mechanisms link training inputs to classroom outcomes and create accountability. The scope must be comprehensive: trade trainers, employability skills trainers, placement officers, and institute principals all require different development, tailored to their distinct roles.

IN PRACTICE

Quest Alliance: Trainer Capacity Building

Quest focuses on creating a cadre of educators equipped to deliver professional development to peers, build blended learning environments, and model 21st-century pedagogy within their institutes. For employability skills trainers, development runs across three days of in-person training covering content and delivery methods, followed by community-of-practice sessions and regular post-training handholding. Placement officer training runs two days with a six-month review checkpoint and ongoing support through WhatsApp communities. Annual curriculum updates ensure training materials stay current. The approach builds capacity within the government system itself so that change is sustainable beyond any external organisation's involvement.

IN PRACTICE

Antarang Foundation: Career Facilitator Training

Antarang delivers its career guidance programme through trained facilitators. Facilitators, typically locally recruited graduates, undergo structured pre-service training covering facilitation methods, counselling techniques, adolescent development, and an understanding of local labour markets. This is followed by ongoing upskilling through monthly workshops and digital learning modules.

Antarang has codified its curriculum and facilitator training systems to ensure consistency across geographies, while allowing facilitators to adapt discussions and examples to the local context. The organisation also monitors each student's career journey over time. Recruiting facilitators from local communities helps ensure they understand the local environment and can build trust with students.

IN PRACTICE:

Medha: Continuous Professional Development for System Actors

Medha works with education and training institutions to establish structured Continuous Professional Development systems for the instructors and staff responsible for student outcomes. The model operates as a recurring cycle combining foundational training, periodic refresher programmes, and ongoing support that helps trainers apply new approaches in their classrooms and institutional roles. Peer learning groups, mentoring, and follow-up engagements create opportunities to reflect on practice and address implementation challenges. Distinct development pathways are designed for trade trainers, employability skills facilitators, placement officers, and institute leaders, ensuring that each role receives targeted support aligned with evolving industry expectations and institutional needs.

LEVER 6: Engage with Parents and Communities to Raise Awareness and Garner Support

What It Is and Why It Matters

Mobilising families and communities as active partners in education and career decisions is essential, particularly for students from disadvantaged backgrounds and young women facing restrictive social norms. For most young people in India, parents are the most powerful influence on education and career decisions. A student who receives effective career guidance at school but faces resistance at home rarely follows through on new career plans.

Structured parent counselling, community workshops, and awareness campaigns can challenge the stigma around skills-based education. The importance is amplified for girls: the 42.4 percent female NEET rate cannot be addressed without engaging the families and communities that shape girls' opportunities.

How to Operationalise It

Parent engagement should include sessions built into the curriculum at regular intervals, covering topics directly relevant to the decisions families face: specific career pathways, employment conditions, wage levels, and the steps required. For vocational education, structured workshops featuring alumni who have completed training and found good employment shift perceptions more effectively than informational materials alone. For girls' participation, conversations with families must be grounded in specific, local evidence, such as which employers provide safe conditions, what transport arrangements look like, and which sectors have strong female workforces.

IN PRACTICE

Antarang Foundation: Structured Parent Sessions

Antarang integrates parent engagement at key transition points in its career guidance programme. In Grades 10 and 12, students receive structured one-on-one counselling alongside focused parent interactions. These sessions help families understand available education and career pathways and support informed decision-making at critical moments when family influence is strongest. For many first-generation learners, they help parents move from relying on limited information to becoming more informed participants in their child's career choices.

IN PRACTICE

Generation India Foundation: Family Involvement in Placement

GIF extends parent engagement into the employment transition itself. Recognising that family resistance or anxiety about relocation is a leading cause of early job exit, GIF conducts two parent meetings during each training programme specifically focused on the employment destination—covering the employer and working environment, the specific job role and daily requirements, salary structure, relocation support, and career growth prospects. The goal is to ensure that when a student accepts an offer, their family understands and supports the decision. For young women in particular, family support for the decision to relocate is frequently the difference between a placement that holds and one that collapses within weeks.

IN PRACTICE

PanIIT Alumni Foundation: Family Engagement Across the Training-to-Employment Journey for Women's Retention

PARFI engages families to strengthen job retention, especially when young women enter formal employment for the first time. Before enrolment, candidates and parents attend structured sessions that explain career pathways, expected salaries, workplace conditions, and loan repayment norms. Parents are encouraged to participate in counselling discussions and seek clarity on safety arrangements before admission formalities begin. Dedicated parental counselling helps address concerns around migration, gender norms, and employment, building family confidence and improving the likelihood of sustained workforce participation during the first employment transition.

CROSS-CUTTING: Placement, Retention, and Post-Placement Support

Beyond Placement: Supporting the Full Transition

Placement is counted as success by most institutions. Retention—whether a young person is still employed after 30, 90, or 365 days—is rarely measured at all. Field evidence from Haryana found that fewer than 30 percent of placed students completed one year of employment. For apprentices, retention was lower still. The causes are well understood: job-expectation mismatch; inadequate wages once relocation costs are factored in; unsafe or degrading working conditions; denial of basic labour entitlements; and the absence of anyone to turn to when difficulties arise. These are addressable—by employers who operate with integrity, by institutions that select compliant employers and continue to monitor placements, and by support systems that are present when students need them.

IN PRACTICE

PanIIT Alumni Foundation: Residential Training with Assured Placements and Structured Retention

PARFI operates residential vocational training centres for youth from underprivileged backgrounds, particularly young women. Placement is built on securing employer commitments before the training is completed. PARFI partners with anchor employers across healthcare, manufacturing, electronics, hospitality, logistics, and construction, and signs formal agreements before the each batch concludes. Employer skill requirements are incorporated directly into training modules and delivered through a blended approach, supported by a Learning Management System and smart classrooms. Students pass internal testing, third-party certification, and employer assessments as structured assessment checkpoints before deployment, starting with paid OJT that transitions into full-time employment upon completing certification.

Post-placement retention is managed through dedicated infrastructure. Retention support assistants and state retention teams visit worksites, counsel students, and resolve employer-side issues. Structured follow-up and remote check-ins maintain oversight. Retention teams guide students on career progression, further education pathways, and basic financial planning. The goal is employment continuity through the first year, when exit rates are highest.

IN PRACTICE

Generation India Foundation: Employment Design and Retention

GIF maps job demand, identifies two to three anchor employers per role, and secures written commitments for at least 1.5 times the number of required placements even before training begins. Employers contribute to defining job roles and performance benchmarks, which feed directly into training curriculum design; graduates arrive knowing the specific work they are going to do.

Post-placement support extends for up to one year: regular check-ins for the first three months, direct employer contact to resolve workplace issues as they arise, access to a clinical psychologist per batch, parent meetings to clarify job roles and relocation details, and re-placement support if a student exits early.

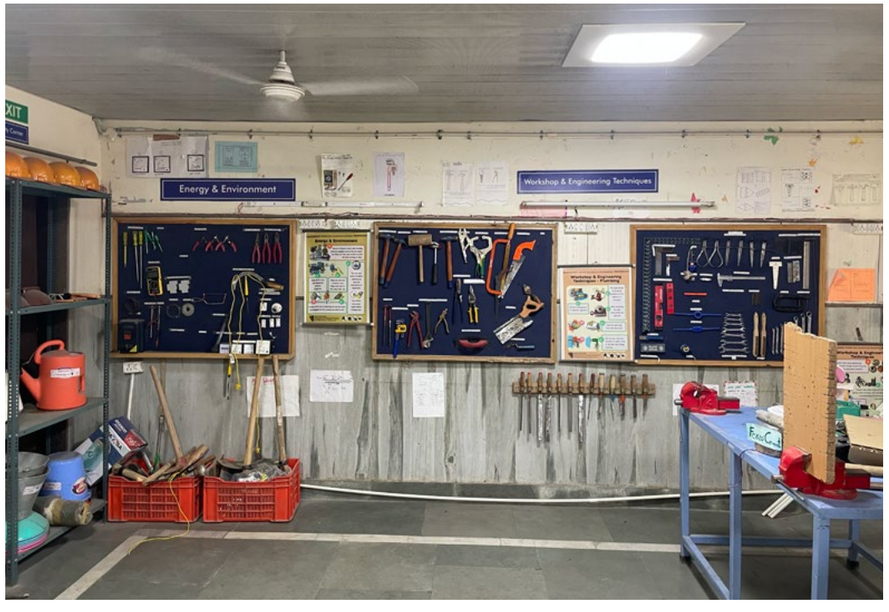


Photo: JustJobs Network (Lend A Hand India field visit)

The Way Forward

The evidence of what works is no longer hypothetical. This research documents a set of operational models that build effective education-to-employment pathways for India's youth. What makes this work distinctive is its demonstration that addressing all levers simultaneously produces transformative results; in essence, the sum is greater than its parts. Isolated reforms deliver limited gains. Coordinated action across career guidance, demand mapping, employability skills, industry partnerships, trainer development, and community engagement creates systemic change that fundamentally improves employment outcomes.

Two findings carry particular operational significance. First, effective demand mapping and career guidance must operate at the local level to succeed. Generic national or state-level insights about "growing sectors" have consistently failed to improve training outcomes. What the evidence shows is that granular, local labour market intelligence—identifying specific employers, roles, and skill needs within defined geographic areas—enables training institutions to align provision with opportunity.

Second, the emphasis on employability skills reflects a fundamental shift in how skills development must respond to rapidly changing work environments. Labour market disruptions from forces including technological advancement, trade shocks, and climate change mean that today's youth will have to change occupations multiple times. Technical competencies alone are insufficient. Transferable skills—communication, adaptability, problem-solving, and collaboration—enable workers to navigate transitions, learn new roles, and maintain employment security in evolving labour markets. This forward-looking approach moves beyond static skills training to build adaptive capacity for long-term resilience.

This report highlights the interventions by JPMorganChase partners that help address the challenges in the education-to-employment journey. This report brings these interventions to different levels of government. The challenge is no longer not knowing what works; it is mobilising the institutional commitment and sustained investment needed to bring proven solutions to every student who needs them.

Endnotes

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11 Periodic Labour Force Survey 2017-18 to 2023-24.

12 Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) 2023-24

13 Enrolment refers to the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER), defined as the total enrolment in a given level of education – regardless of age – expressed as a percentage of the official population in the corresponding age group.

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JustJobs NETWORK

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