

IS AI CLOSING THE DOOR ON ENTRY-LEVEL JOBS?

AI is compressing routine work, forcing young professionals to rethink how they build skills and careers

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A few years ago, ad agencies routinely hired junior copywriters to write standard product descriptions, meta tags and email copy. Call centres were once a popular entry point into the workforce. Even data entry executives were once highly valued across organisations. Today, however, data entry is among the jobs most vulnerable to AI automation, with more than 7.5 million such jobs expected to be eliminated by 2027.

The rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its rapid adoption across sectors is fundamentally changing the structure of work. According to the World Economic Forum, more than one in three young workers globally (37%) are employed in occupations with medium-to-high exposure to AI-driven task change. At the same time, junior-level job postings fell 7% year-over-year in 2025, while senior-level postings rose 4%, according to a career-hunting portal.

Gen Z has become a buzzword in India, whether in politics, entertainment, education or the job market. Yet it is this generation that is increasingly finding itself at the centre of the AI-driven transformation of work. A new Stanford study found that employment among workers aged 22 to 25 in highly AI-exposed occupations declined by about 11% between November 2022 and June 2026, while employment among the same age group in less AI-exposed jobs grew by roughly 10%. The findings raise an important question: is this a warning sign for young people entering the workforce? Shantanu Rooj, Founder and CEO, TeamLease EdTech, doesn't mince words when he said that early-career roles are certainly among the most exposed to AI-led task change, but exposure should not be confused with job elimination. "The World Economic Forum estimates that 37% of young workers globally are employed in occu-

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pations with medium-to-high exposure to AI-driven task change, largely because junior roles traditionally contain a higher proportion of routine tasks such as research, documentation, data processing, basic coding and customer support. However, the ILO finds that one in four workers globally is in an occupation with some GenAI exposure, while only 3.3% of global employment falls into its highest-exposure category, and concludes that transformation is more likely than wholesale replacement," he said. In fact, Rooj cited TeamLease EdTech's Career Outlook Report HY2 2026 where they observed that despite rapid AI adoption, 75% of employers intend to hire freshers during July-December 2026, with AI Application Developer itself among the leading entry-level roles.

According to Pravesh Dudani, Founder & Chancellor, Medhavi Skills University, AI is not eliminating careers, it is eliminating the conventional way of entering them. "The real danger is not that AI takes away every entry-level job, but that we lose the learning opportunities embedded within those jobs. The answer cannot be to protect outdated roles. We need to redesign such roles by combining AI with apprenticeship, mentorship, problem-solving and real-world exposure," he said. The disruption is not limited to a particular industry or geography. In an NDTV interview, IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva said

that an estimated 40 per cent of the global workforce - entry-level jobs in particular - will be impacted by AI and AI-based technological disruptions.

For young job seekers, therefore, the challenge is not simply to acquire AI skills but to develop capabilities that complement technology. Dr Mary N Odyuo, Associate Professor, Department of Agricultural Extension Education, Nagaland University, believes that young job seekers should learn how to use AI as a tool, while also developing communication, critical thinking, creativity, problem solving and adaptability. "AI skills alone are not enough. They need to know how to use technology while bringing skills that AI cannot easily replace like good communication and empathy," he said.

The debate over AI and jobs has also prompted warnings from some of the world's leading technology voices. In a recent interview to 'The New York Times', Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates warned that AI could cause unprecedented disruption to jobs and pose serious risks to human life. Swapnil Sahoo, Great Lakes Institute of Management, Gurgaon, is

optimistic. He is not saying that AI is simply eliminating entry-level jobs but it is eliminating or compressing many of the routine tasks on which entry-level jobs were traditionally built. That distinction is important. "The pressure is clearly strongest in roles dominated by repeatable cognitive work—basic coding, documentation, preliminary research, data processing, standard customer support, report preparation and first-level analysis. We are already seeing this in India," he said. The educationist has a few suggestions for early-career seekers. "If I were entering the workforce today, I would focus on becoming AI-enabled rather than simply AI-literate. Knowing how to use ChatGPT, Copilot or another AI tool will soon be basic workplace hygiene. It will not, by itself, differentiate a candidate. I would focus on five capabilities: AI fluency, domain knowledge, analytical thinking, communication and human judgment," he said.

The message for Gen Z is becoming increasingly clear: the entry-level job may not disappear altogether, but the traditional entry point into a career is changing. The real challenge for young professionals, therefore, is not merely to compete with AI, but to learn how to work with it while building the distinctly human capabilities that technology cannot easily replicate.

