

## The Indian Society of Labour Economics

The Indian Society of Labour Economics (ISLE) is a professional association of researchers, scholars and other stakeholders interested in the area of labour, employment and development issues. The Society promotes scientific studies of labour markets, employment, employment relations and related issues and disseminates knowledge. It publishes a quarterly, peer-reviewed journal The Indian Journal of Labour Economics (IJLE), which is now in its 69<sup>th</sup> year of publication. Promoting and featuring scientific studies on labour and employment issues, the journal is co-published with Springer. More information on the journal is available on <http://www.springer.com/economics/journal/41027>



**THE INDIAN SOCIETY OF LABOUR ECONOMICS**

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**A Panel Discussion during  
66<sup>th</sup> ISLE Conference**

## The Global South at an AI Crossroads: Labour Market Transitions Across Africa, Asia, and Latin America

Organised by



**19 January 2026 | Pune**



# About the Panel

## The Global South at an AI Crossroads: Labour Market Transitions Across Africa, Asia, and Latin America

### Background

Artificial intelligence is reshaping the foundations of work, and nowhere are the stakes higher than in the Global South. Unlike advanced economies with formal labour markets and robust safety nets, countries across Africa, Asia, and Latin America confront this shift with high informality, uneven social protection, and wide skill gaps. The core question is not simply how many jobs AI will disrupt, but who stands to gain and who risks being pushed further to the margins.

This panel examines how AI is altering labour markets across the Global South's diverse economic landscapes. It brings into focus the paradox that defines the moment: capturing AI's productivity potential while containing its social and economic risks. The conversation will engage with urgent questions such as:

- Which jobs and sectors are most vulnerable and which new opportunities may emerge?
- How can governments and institutions govern AI responsibly within fragile labour-market systems?
- What cross-regional lessons can help ensure AI becomes a force for opportunity rather than a driver of deeper inequality?



# Programme

**MONDAY, 19 JANUARY 2026**

- Moderator : **Sabina Dewan**  
President and Executive Director  
JustJobs Network
- Panelists : **Megan Ballesty**  
Fellow, Sur Futuro at Red Sudamericana de Economia Aplicada, Montevideo Montevideo, Uruguay and  
Co-Founder & Public Policy Specialist
- : **Helani Galpaya**  
Chief Executive Officer (CEO), LIRNEasia, Colombo,  
Sri Lanka
- : **Ali Abboud**  
Assistant Professor, Department of Economics  
American University, Beirut
- : **Ruth Castel-Branco**  
Senior Lecturer, Southern Centre for Inequality  
Studies, University of the Witwatersrand
- Panel Coordinators : **Anita Manoharan**  
Head of Programs & Development  
JustJobs Network
- : **Shipra Nigam**  
Research Director, JustJobs Network



# Biographies of the Resource Persons

## Sabina Dewan



Sabina Dewan is the Founder and Executive Director of the JustJobs Network - a global institution that produces cutting-edge, actionable research on good job creation and workforce development. Under Ms. Dewan's leadership, the JustJobs Network has grown to exert significant influence on the global discourse on employment and the governance of labour markets.

Ms. Dewan has been a Senior Visiting Fellow at the Centre for Policy Research in India, and a Non-Resident Fellow at the Carsey School of Public Policy at the University of New Hampshire. Before this, she served as a Senior Fellow and Director for International Economic Policy at the Center for American Progress in Washington DC.

Ms. Dewan's research examines how major forces from technology to climate change are upending traditional employment. Rapid and constantly changing labour markets call for equally dynamic education and skills development policies and practice. Ms. Dewan's work draws on field-based research and partnerships to connect findings from the ground to policy at national and international levels. She works closely with governments, businesses, multilateral, and grassroots organizations providing critical labour market insights to help generate more employment, cultivate employability, and promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

Ms. Dewan's wide experience includes working with institutions including the World Bank, the International Labour Organization, and the European Commission, as well as grassroots organizations in Sierra Leone, India and



Western Samoa. She serves on several global and local committees. She is one of six advisors to the Swedish Prime Minister's Global Deal initiative. She serves as a member of the Global Challenges Foundation's Climate Governance Commission. She is a member of the Confederation of Indian Industry's National Committee on Skills and Livelihoods; Niti Aayog's advisory committee for 'Vision 2035', and is part of the advisory group for Work Fair and Free Foundation. She played a key role in integration of vocational education in India's National Education Policy 2020 and National Curriculum Framework 2023.

Ms. Dewan appears regularly in several international media outlets, including The Wall Street Journal, Financial Times, US News and World Report, Mint, Hindu Business Line, CNN, BBC, Al-Jazeera, TimesNow and NDTV.

### **Megan Ballesty**



Megan Ballesty is the co-founder of Sur Futuro, where she leads research and policy initiatives aimed at expanding access to resilient jobs for people across Latin America in the face of technological, climate, and demographic change. An economist and public policy specialist, she is also an affiliated researcher at the Center for Studies on Human Development. Her work focuses on the role of work in people's development and on anticipating labour market transformations, with a strong gender lens.

Megan has led several studies at the intersection of technology, work, and gender including: *An Unequal Race: Gender Inequalities in Argentina's Higher Education System* (2022) and the *Atlas of Future-Oriented Jobs* (2024 and 2025), where he co-developed a methodological approach to quantify geographical and gender gaps of occupations with strong future potential across 22 countries in Latin America. She is also leading Reimagining Platform Work, an initiative that synthesizes recommendations and identifies areas of consensus among scholars across the region on how to improve working conditions in platform-mediated work.

### **Helani Galpaya**

Helani Galpaya is Chief Executive Officer of LIRNEasia, a pro-poor, pro-market think tank working on digital policy and regulatory issues across the emerging





Asia Pacific. Helani researches and engages in public discourse on topics of infrastructure investment, digital rights, labor markets and social welfare, governance of algorithms, data and artificial intelligence. Currently Helani leads the FutureWorks Hub for Asia which sub-grants and creates new research knowledge on how Asia's workers can ensure they are ready to face the challenges to labor brought on as a result of demographic changes, climate change and technology adoption. FutureWorks Asia is part of a network of five such hubs (located in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Middle East).

### **Ali Abboud**



Ali is an economist with research interest in Labor Economics, Inequality and Demography. He joined the Department of Economics at the American University of Beirut in Spring 2022. He is also a University Fellow at the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs. His research focuses on: (1) the relation between demographic factors and dynamic labor supply choices and labor earnings, with special focus on women and youth, (2) the determinants of wealth and income inequalities in developing countries, and (3) colonial legacy on nation building and economic inclusion in the Global South. Prior to joining AUB Ali was an Early Career Fellow with the Arab Council for Social Sciences and a postdoctoral researcher at the Ohio State University.

### **Ruth Castel-Branco**



Ruth Castel-Branco is a Senior Lecturer at the Southern Centre for Inequality Studies (SCIS), where she manages the Future of Work(ers) Project and lectures Theory and Methods in Inequality Studies. She holds a PhD in Sociology from the University of the Witwatersrand, a MA in Development Studies from the University of KwaZulu Natal, and a BA in Geography/African Studies from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Her research centres on structural transformation the changing nature of work, the implications for workers' struggles and political claim making, and the redistributive role of the state and social protection. Prior to joining SCIS



she worked for the International Labour Organization on maternity and social protection in Mozambique.

### Anita Manoharan



Anita Manoharan is the Program Director at JustJobs Network, where she brings over 15 years of experience in education, program design, capacity building, and leadership development. With a focus on advancing research-driven policy and creating impactful, scalable programs, Anita has demonstrated a deep commitment to shaping outcomes across education, governance, and democratic engagement. Her expertise lies in integrating research insights into program strategy, design, and implementation, and she is adept at developing evidence-based frameworks that empower individuals, organizations, and institutions to drive systemic change.

Throughout her career, Anita has worked closely with policymakers, civil society organizations, and academic institutions to shape policy agendas that address critical issues such as educational equity, workforce development, and civic participation. Before joining JustJobs Network, she held pivotal roles at the Indian School of Democracy and Teach For India, where she collaborated with diverse stakeholders to design and implement high-impact programs that fostered democratic engagement, leadership development, and effective governance.

Anita's expertise extends beyond program implementation to encompass rigorous policy analysis, advocacy, and the integration of policy recommendations into organizational practice. She has a proven track record of developing and evaluating programs that align with both local and global policy frameworks, contributing to the enhancement of governance structures and the promotion of accountability at the grassroots level. Her leadership has played a key role in building capacity at various levels, driving organizational culture change, and ensuring effective policy implementation in complex and evolving contexts.

Holding a Master's in Public Administration from the London School of Economics, Anita is deeply committed to advancing policy research that bridges the gap between theory and practice. She has led efforts to build cross-sectoral partnerships, leveraging data and research to inform policy decisions and contribute to evidence-based practices in education and governance.



## Shipra Nigam



Dr. Shipra Nigam is a development economist with over 18 years of experience across research, policy, and academia. Her work focuses on the macroeconomics of growth, employment, and structural change, with particular emphasis on informality, gender and labour markets, and the political economy of development in the Global South.

She is currently Research Director at the JustJobs Network, where she leads research on employment transitions and labour market transformations across developing economies. Her work has contributed to high-impact publications, including the India Employment Report 2024 (IHD-ILO), and she has authored several papers on labour markets, trade liberalisation, and the gendered dynamics of economic change.

Dr. Nigam has held research and academic positions with institutions including UN India, RIS, the Institute of Human Development, IWRAP-Asia Pacific (Malaysia), the Institute for New Economic Thinking (INET), IDEAs, Lady Shri Ram College, and IIT Delhi. She was a Fulbright Doctoral and Professional Research Fellow at the New School for Social Research, New York.

She holds a Ph.D. and M.Phil. in Economics from Jawaharlal Nehru University, an M.A. in Economics from the University of Hyderabad, and a B.Com. (Hons.) from Lady Shri Ram College, University of Delhi.

