



THE INDIAN SOCIETY OF LABOUR ECONOMICS ANNUAL CONFERENCE

19-21 January 2026 | Symbiosis School of Economics, Symbiosis International (Deemed) University, Pune, India

XIIIth IAWS-ISLE Panel on **Gender and Labour: Women and the Changing Landscape of Technology**

MONDAY | 19 JANUARY 2026

Organised by



Background

The joint panel of the ISLE and IAWS at the 66th National ISLE conference seeks to provide a broad survey and synthesis of ongoing discussions and research on the gendered impacts of technological developments like the rapid growth of digital innovations, the burgeoning of digital labour platforms ('gig work'), and the automation of certain kinds of work.

Digital innovations comprising artificial intelligence (AI), robotics, cloud computing, data analytics, etc. seems to have penetrated different segments of the economy and employment. The innovations encompass a wide range of occupations, from software developers and programmers to Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) workers to domestic workers and a host of 'gig' workers on digital labour platforms, to market vendors and microentrepreneurs who use digital tools to reach customers. The present context of high and growing unemployment has propelled governments, international development agencies and a section of scholars and analysts to project such technological innovations as the key to enhanced productivity, competitiveness and employment generation. Other assessments reveal plummeting of workers' bargaining power, massive job losses, and other adverse impacts of digital technologies on marginalized workforces, specifically women.

Clearly, the evolving landscape of technology revolving on 4.0 technology (also described as the fourth industrial revolution) encompasses its own share of problems and prospects. Like all earlier technological innovations and developments were imbricated in their social milieu, so are the contemporary developments in technology. These developments in technology need to be contextualized within gender inequalities that exist in society and within the labour market in terms of participation in the labour force, wage structures, and education. Such contextualization reveals that women workers' relationship to technology is tenuous, given the unequal access to skilling, education in STEM, digital technology, and their heavy concentration in clerical, service, and sales positions where automation is well underway. On an average, women performing more routine tasks than men, puts their jobs at high risk of automation – the exception being certain low wage feminized jobs in the care services which do not easily attract investment in labour-saving technologies.



Even in the sectors where digitalization has accompanied job creation, there is need to critically engage with concerns about the quality and inclusivity of these new forms of employment. Women in such largely incentivized work are confronted by low stagnant wages, gender wage gaps, unsafe work conditions, and algorithmic management practices like time-based tasks, customer rating as well as 'dynamic' pricing restricted to evenings and weekends which altogether disadvantage women workers who juggle their own care responsibilities. Indeed, digitalized forms of employment represent the new ways in which capital and technology subsume the labour and life of women workers. Despite the promise of flexibility that accompanies such work, this is often accompanied by expansive surveillance and control that the platforms and 'new-age' workplaces exercise over employees' work schedules and their access to work through rating systems.

Running parallel to this larger paradigm is of course another side to the story. Presently, many work processes involving high levels of women's labour, such as paid and unpaid domestic work, public sanitation, certain kinds of agrarian work, and so on, are characterized by little use of technological inputs. This is despite significant technological developments and advanced technological inputs permeating the market. Evidently, the world of technology has recorded a certain degree of dynamism as well as stasis, and this in many ways is the essence of its connection to women's lives.

To take these discussions forward, the panel will draw attention to the following issues:

- a) Patterns of technological developments and women's labour;
- b) Problems and prospects of digital innovations in workspaces with respect to women's lives, labour, and liberty;
- c) Dynamism and stasis of technology and women's life-worlds;
- d) Resilience, resistance, and possibilities of transformation.

PROGRAMME

- Chair** : **Ritu Dewan**
Visiting Professor, Institute for Human Development, New Delhi and
Former Professor & Director, Department of Economics, University of
Mumbai
- Co-Chair** : **Ishita Mukhopadhyay**
Professor, Calcutta University, Kolkata
- Panelists** : **Lakshmi Lingam**
Chair Professor, School of Public Health, D Y Patil University, Mumbai
- : **Maya John**
Activist and Academician, University of Delhi and General Secretary,
Indian Association for Women's Studies (IAWS)
- : **Dev Nathan**
Professor, Institute for Human Development, New Delhi
- : **G. Manjunath**
Additional Labour Commissioner, Government of Karnataka
- Discussant** : **Kalpana Karunakaran**
Associate Professor, Indian Institute of Technology Madras and
President, Indian Association for Women's Studies (IAWS)

