



THE INDIAN SOCIETY OF LABOUR ECONOMICS ANNUAL CONFERENCE

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

Panel on

Revisiting Rural Transformation: Employment Conditions and the Challenges of Structural Change

TUESDAY | 20 JANUARY 2026

Organised by



Conventional theories of structural transformation suggest that economic development is often marked by a shift in employment from the agricultural sector to higher-productivity sectors such as industry and services. Contrary to expectations that liberalisation and market-oriented reforms would accelerate this transformation, recent trends suggest a stagnation, and in some respects, a reversal, of structural change. In India, while agriculture's share in GDP has declined over time, its share in employment remains persistently high. The rural economy, in particular, continues to be shaped by underemployment, low and, most recently, declining real wages, and rising informalisation. Despite decades of economic reforms, rural India has not experienced sustained industrial expansion or quality job creation. Instead, the share of self-employment and casual labour has increased, often reflecting deepening distress rather than expanding opportunity on the employment front. The recent resurgence in agricultural employment, amplified by the COVID-19-induced reverse migration, further indicates that the rural economy is absorbing displaced labour without improving livelihoods. These trends cannot be attributed solely to short-term policy shocks such as demonetisation, GST, or the pandemic. Rather, they reflect deeper structural issues, including the retreat of the state from employment generation, reduced public investment, and a policy focus on labour market flexibility over job security.

This panel intends to examine the prevailing assumptions of India's growth strategy and explore the lived realities of rural workers facing a crisis of work. In particular, the panel will explore topics such as the persistence of agrarian labour, the quality of non-farm employment, the informalisation of manufacturing, gendered labour force participation, and rising inequality. In doing so, it argues that structural transformation must be understood not merely as sectoral shifts, but as a process deeply embedded in class, caste, and gender relations.

The panel will deliberate on some of the following Issues/Questions:

- Non-Farm Employment: Understanding Some Recent Developments
- Agricultural Workers in Transition: Wages, Incomes, and Labour Relations
- Deindustrialisation and the Crisis of Workforce Formalisation
- Quality Employment in a Demand-Constrained Economy
- Female Workforce Participation: Empowerment, Distress, or Both?
- Caste and Mobility: Are Rural Workers Escaping Economic Inequality?



PROGRAMME

- Chair** : **D N Reddy**
Hon. Visiting Professor, Institute for Human Development and
Former Professor of Economics, University of Hyderabad
- Presentations** : **Avanindra Nath Thakur**
Professor of Economics, Jindal School of Government and Public Policy
O.P. Jindal Global University, Sonipat.
Topic: **Recent trends of Labour Absorption and its Implications for
Structural Transformation of the Workforce: Evidence from the PLFS Data**
- : **Himanshu**
Associate Professor, Centre for Economic Studies and Planning, Jawaharlal
Nehru University, New Delhi
Topic: **Recent Trends of Real Wages and Earnings in India**
- : **Gurpreet Singh**
Associate Professor and Associate Dean (International Collaborations)
Jindal School of Government and Public Policy (JSGP), O.P. Jindal Global
University, Sonipat.
Nivedita Sharma
Associate Professor at Jindal Global Business School (JGBS)
O.P. Jindal Global University, Sonipat and Visiting Fellow, Council for Social
Development, New Delhi
Topic: **Circulatory Structural Transformation in Punjab: Farm and Non-Farm
Employment Dynamics**
- : **Manish Kumar**
Assistant Professor, Department of Economics
Delhi School of Economics University of Delhi
Topic: **MGNREGA: A Common Interest of Indian Farmers and Agriculture
Workers**
- : **Santosh Kumar Verma**
Independent Researcher, Centre for Budget and Governance
Accountability, New Delhi
Topic: **Employment Conditions and Wage Trends in Bihar**
- Discussant** : **Jens Lerche**
Emeritus Professor, Agrarian and Labour Studies
Department of Development Studies, SOAS University, London

