

# EVENT REPORT

## Online Freelancing: Challenges, Opportunities and Impact in India

**27 December 2017,  
India Habitat Centre  
New Delhi**



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## 1.0 Context

The scope and scale of the online freelancing ecosystem is rapidly expanding to incorporate a wider variety of skills, work types and time committed. It is an opportunity for the vast pool of informal labour in India, especially women. The flexibility offered by online freelancing platforms could fit in well with the demands of an evolving society that is looking for fulfilling and independent opportunities of livelihood. Well-developed policies can help enforce the idea of a mixed labour work force that picks between fulltime and contractual work based on personal preferences. As bots take over a wide range of low-skill, repetitive tasks, skill development programs should look beyond computer literacy for individuals in order to sustain the growth of online freelancing and microwork.

LIRNE*asia*, in partnership with Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER) and Vihara Innovation Technologies studied online freelancing and microwork in India. The study revealed that the risk of job destruction due to digital technology could be converted into an opportunity through online freelancing and microwork in which some percentage of the millions of new and young entrants to the labour force could find livelihood opportunities.

Findings of the qualitative and quantitative research conducted in India were disseminated on 27<sup>th</sup> December 2017 at the India Habitat Center, New Delhi.

## 2.0 Dissemination workshop of the research on “Online Freelancing: Challenges, Opportunities and Impact in India”

Government and private sector officials of skill-development and employment-generation organizations participated at this workshop. Dr. K. P. Krishnan, Secretary, Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, Govt. of India made the keynote address focused on jobs in India and changing markets. Helani Galpaya, Chief Executive Officer, LIRNEasia, Sri Lanka and Dr. Rajat Kathuria, Director & Chief Executive, ICRIER, India presented the findings of qualitative and quantitative data on online freelancing and microwork in India, respectively.

“As part of the research, we conducted focus groups with over 300 current and potential freelancers in India. We found that online freelancing is a solution to under-employment, through which, people who are already working make much needed additional income. For many women who are stay-at-home mothers, it was seen as an opportunity to make at least a little bit of money independently, without having to ask their husbands for money. Unlike in many other countries, India has a large enough local market to create demand for its workers. In contrast, in Sri Lanka, where we did similar research, a majority of workers serve overseas clients. Additionally, in India, it’s not just the traditional global platforms such as Upwork, Freelancer.com and others that draw workers. Many highly local and localized Indian platforms are used – and often preferred – by workers in India. Furthermore, Facebook, LinkedIn and many other social and professional networking sites are used by buyers and sellers of online work to find each other. Variable income guarantee and a lack of social security schemes (e.g. pensions) are keeping many from doing such work. Recognizing employment categories beyond the traditional “employed, unemployed, self-employed” would help these workers immensely in accessing financial services, as would contributory insurance schemes which help them save for the future.”

**Helani Galpaya, CEO, LIRNEasia.**

“There is a need to build awareness and correct perceptions, indeed prejudices, related to microwork and online freelancing in India. The traditional mindset that privileges full-time employment over freelancing is a hard nut to crack. The labour market like other markets exhibits dynamism and our own thinking ought to reflect the idea that a mixed labour force that picks between full time and contractual work based on personal preferences is the future.”

**Dr. Rajat Kathuria, Director and CE, ICRIER.**

Mr. R. Chandrashekhar, President, NASSCOM led the panel discussion on future of jobs.

This session was followed by a question and answer session open to the participants.

### 3.0 Event Participants

Forty participants representing government institutions, industry trade associations, media, LIRNEasia and ICRIER attended the event.

**Table 1: List of Participants**

| <b>Participant</b>      | <b>Organization</b>                                | <b>Position</b>     |
|-------------------------|--|---------------------|
| <b>M C Verma</b>        | IC Center for Governance                           | Director            |
| <b>Tilak Arora</b>      | Retired  |                     |
| <b>Indraneel Manda</b>  | Institute of Technology and Science                | Assistant Professor |
| <b>Avinash Kirpal</b>   | Mentor for SME                                     | Mentor              |
| <b>A V K Murthy</b>     |  | Professor           |
| <b>R P Lal</b>          | India Meteorological Department                    | Scientist E         |
| <b>Dr. S Prabakar</b>   | Loksabha Society                                   | Joint Director      |
| <b>Komal Sharma</b>     |  | Director            |
| <b>Anupam Khanna</b>    |  |                     |
| <b>Sam Ray</b>          |  |                     |
| <b>Dr. Gaurav</b>       |  |                     |
| <b>R Chandrasekaran</b> |  |                     |
| <b>S Ramakrishnan</b>   | Teri SAS   | Professor           |
| <b>Mohan Bajikav</b>    | Agrihouse  | CMD                 |
| <b>V A Azad</b>         | AEDR   | Professor           |
| <b>Gangesh</b>          | ICRIER   | Consultant          |
| <b>Richa</b>            | ICRIER   | ICRIER              |
| <b>Kaushamti</b>        | ICRIER   | Research Assistant  |
| <b>K P Krishnan</b>     | Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship | Secretary           |
| <b>H V Singh</b>        | Brookings India                                    | Researcher          |
| <b>Dr. Kanta Mehta</b>  |  | Advisor             |
| <b>Dr. S Panday</b>     | ICRIER   |                     |
| <b>Mansi Kedia</b>      | ICRIER   | Consultant          |
| <b>Ravi Kumar</b>       | ICRIER   |                     |
| <b>Saumitra Khullar</b> | ICRIER   |                     |
| <b>Rhee Sinha</b>       | ICRIER   |                     |
| <b>Manish Kumar</b>     | NSDC   | MD and CEO          |
| <b>J Jena</b>           | COAI   | DDG                 |
| <b>Vikram</b>           | COAI   | DDG                 |
| <b>Kashyap</b>          | CPR  | Researcher          |

|                       |                           |                        |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| <b>Dr. M R Daniel</b> | Ministry                  | Professor of Economics |
| <b>Ram P Katyal</b>   | NCAER                     | Senior Consultant      |
| <b>D Bharalwaj</b>    | Planning commision        | IT Advisor             |
| <b>Nanda</b>          | FICCI                     |                        |
| <b>G S Telvaraj</b>   |                           |                        |
| <b>Tanmay Avasti</b>  | Vihara innovation Network | Researcher             |
| <b>Dinesh Sharma</b>  |                           |                        |
| <b>R S Raurat</b>     |                           |                        |
| <b>Prasoon</b>        | PTI                       |                        |

## 4.0 Event Agenda

- 10:00am – 10:30am Registration
- 10:30am – 10:35am Welcome Remarks  
Dr. Rajat Kathuria, Director & CE, ICRIER
- 10:35am – 10:45am Opening Remarks  
Helani Galpaya, Chief Executive Officer, LIRNEasia
- 10:45am – 11:05am Keynote Address  
Dr. K. P. Krishnan, Secretary, Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, Government. of India
- 11:05 – 11:15am Tea Break Interactive Session
- 11:15am – 12:00pm Dissemination of Research Findings  
Dr. Rajat Kathuria, Director & CE, ICRIER  
Helani Galpaya, Chief Executive Officer, LIRNEasia  
Research team
- 12:00pm – 01:00pm Panel Discussion  
Moderated by R. Chandrashekhar, President, NASSCOM  
Panelists:
- Sanjeev Bikhchandani, Co-Founder and Executive Vice Chairman, Info Edge
  - Dr. Manish Kumar, Managing Director & CEO, National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC)
  - Dr. Harsha Vardhana Singh, Executive Director, Brookings India
- 01:00pm – 01:25pm Questions and Answers
- 01:25pm – 01:30pm Vote of Thanks  
ICRIER
- 01:30pm onwards Lunch

## 5.0 Media Coverage and Impact

### [70-80 per cent jobs in India can be potentially outsourced: Study](#)

Economic Times

The traditional mindset that privileges full-time employment over freelancing is a hard nut to crack," **ICRIER** Director **Rajat Kathuria** said. He said that the study aimed to find scenario of online freelance jobs to address issue of underemployment in India. "We find that online freelancing is a solution to ...

### [70-80% jobs in India can be potentially outsourced: Study](#)

Times of India

"The stability and security of a traditional 9am to 5pm job is still seen as superior," the study said. Skill Development and Entrepreneurship Ministry Secretary K P Krishnan said that three factors, technology, organisation and employment patterns, are rapidly changing work environment in India and in the rest of the world.

### [70-80% jobs in India can be potentially outsourced: Study](#)

India Today

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www.thehansindia.com

Around 70-80 per cent of jobs in India can be potentially outsourced but companies are reluctant to hire freelancers for their work, a joint study by research firms **ICRIER** and **LIRNEasia** said.

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www.outlookindia.com

Around 70-80 per cent of jobs in India can be potentially outsourced but companies are reluctant to hire freelancers for their work, a joint study by research firms **ICRIER** and **LIRNEasia** said. "Indian companies are still unwilling to see the benefits of outsourcing to freelancers. Freelancing platforms state ...

### [70-80% jobs in India can be potentially outsourced: Study](#)

www.india.com

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Krishnan said that three factors, technology, organisation and employment patterns, are rapidly changing work environment in India and in the rest of the world.

**[80 per cent jobs in India may get outsourced to freelancers](#)**

The Deccan Chronicle

The study found that freelancers are treated as 'second grade' compared to individuals with permanent jobs.