

RESEARCH REPORT · SEPTEMBER 2026

AI Hiring Trends 2026

IT hiring overall is slowing, but India's AI hiring is growing. This report will show the data, explain the five roles of high demand, and provide insight on salary information.

HEADLINE FIGURE

+45%

Growth in AI/ML job postings
across FY2026
Naukri JobSpeak [1]

+59.5%

YoY growth in AI engineering
postings, India
LinkedIn [2]

3.8 lakh

AI roles projected in India in
2026
foundit [3]

#1

AI skills ranked India's hardest
capability to hire
ManpowerGroup [4]

+729%

YoY growth in Forward Deployed Engineer (FDE) job postings, India
Indeed / TOI [45]

HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

Every statistic is cited with a number in the source list placed at the end. Salary data are reports of salaries, not offers; for each source, sample size, and retrieval date are labelled. Sample sizes for specific jobs are very small. Therefore, these values should be interpreted directionally. Where sources disagree, both values are reported. When a potentially far-reaching claim could not be validated with a primary source, it was not reported in this edition, but rather removed

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**BUILD THE BRIDGE, NOT A
RESET**

Which of the six roles is closest
to your background?

SECTION 01

The evidence: AI hiring is accelerating

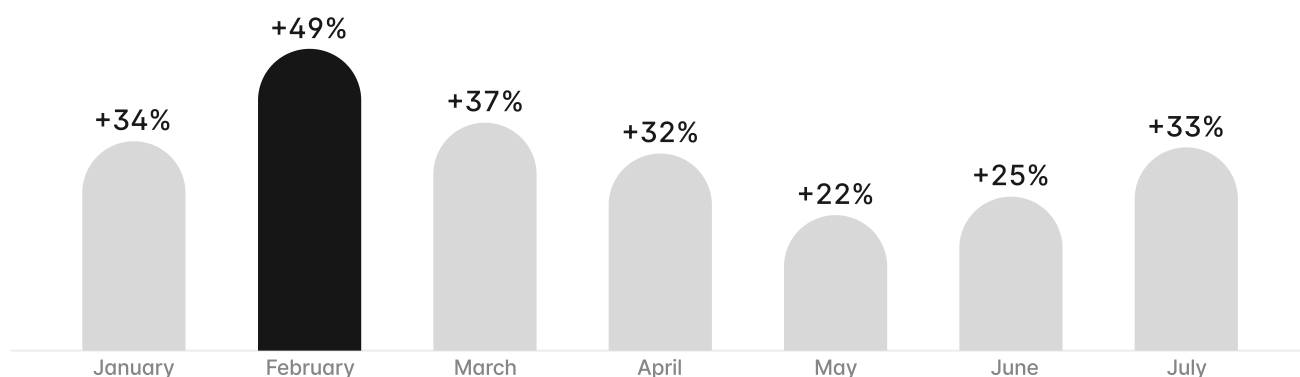
India's white-collar job market has seen annual growth of 8% in FY2026. This is the best three-year period for growth. While this is significant growth, it is still not a boom [1]. AI hiring inside that market is a different story entirely: +45% across the same financial year.

THROUGHOUT THIS REPORT, FY2026 MEANS APRIL 2025 TO MARCH 2026. DATES GIVEN AS MONTHS ARE CALENDAR MONTHS.

AI/ML JOB POSTINGS, INDIA – YEAR ON YEAR GROWTH BY CALENDAR MONTH, 2026

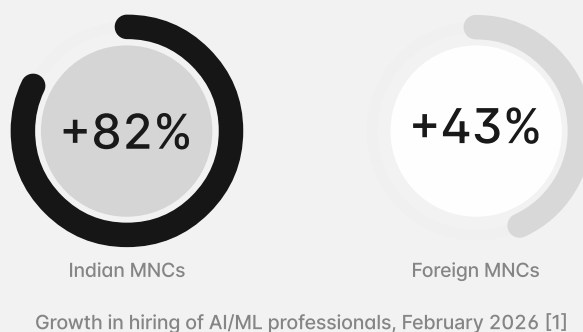
Calendar month, 2026

YoY growth in AI/ML job postings



Source: Naukri JobSpeak Index, monthly reports January–July 2026 [1]. When referring to the time period, these numbers correspond to calendar months. When talking about financial years, the +45% elsewhere is a financial-year consolidation of FY2026 (April 2025 to March 2026), which means it only intersects this table in January, February and March. April to July 2026 falls in FY2027. These two periods do not intersect, and this table should not be interpreted as providing a 45% average. Every month of 2026 has posted double-digit growth. The slowdown in May white-collar hiring was seasonal, not a sign of decreased AI demand. July numbers were back to +33% growth.

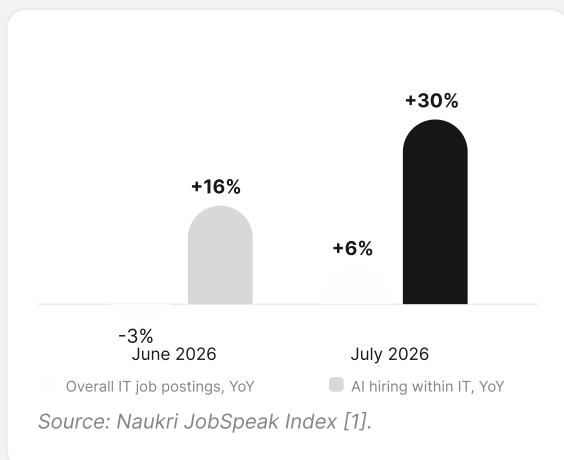
The Indian white collar job market grew by 8% over FY2026. The hiring of AI/ML professionals grew by 45% over the same period. In February, hiring of AI/ML professionals grew by 49%, with Indian MNCs showing +82% growth compared to +43% growth in hiring of AI/ML professionals by foreign MNCs [1].



In the last decade, the pattern was the opposite of what is being witnessed now. The hiring of AI professionals by domestic Indian firms has outpaced the hiring of AI professionals by foreign firms.

FINDING 01 · AI HIRING TRENDS 2026

THE DIVERGENCE: AI HIRING INSIDE A CONTRACTING IT SECTOR



PERIOD	OVERALL IT JOB POSTINGS, YOY	AI HIRING WITHIN IT, YOY
June 2026	-3%	+16%
July 2026	+6%	+30%

The issue is not that there was a decline in IT hiring - that typically happens and is recovered within a month. The issue is the ratio - whether the sector contracts or expands, there is an exponential increase in AI-related positions over traditional positions. It is not that generic IT experience is becoming obsolete; it is more like that experience is the foundation of an AI specialization.

THE VOLUME BEHIND THE PERCENTAGES

2.9 lakh

AI roles across India, 2025
foundit [3]

3.8 lakh

Projected for FY26, on 32% growth
foundit [3]

3.5 lakh

Active AI job postings, mid-2026
Quesst Corp [5]

15.4%

Share of tech job descriptions with AI skills
Naukri [6]

63%

Indian employers reporting a YoY rise in AI hiring
Indeed-NASSCOM [7]

82%

Indian employers reporting difficulty filling roles
ManpowerGroup [4]

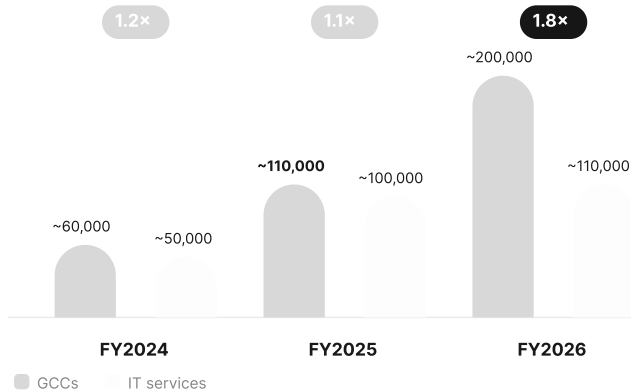
ManpowerGroup also ranks AI skills as the single hardest capability to hire in India [4].

SECTION 01 · THE GCC ENGINE

Global Capability Centres are now India's primary tech employer

For the third year in a row, GCCs recruited more net employees than traditional IT services firms in India. For FY2026, the gap escalated sharply, and unlike the IT services placements, GCC hiring is concentrated on the roles discussed in this report.

NEW HIRES BY NET EMPLOYEE COUNT



FINANCIAL YEAR	GCCS	IT SERVICES	GCC MULTIPLE
FY2024	~60,000	~50,000	1.2x
FY2025	~110,000	~100,000	1.1x
FY2026	~200,000	~110,000	1.8x

New hires by net employee count. Source: Xpheno estimates, Business Standard, May 2026 [8]. About two-thirds of the net new additions were attributable to GCCs for FY2026. Numbers are rounded order-of-magnitude estimates, not verified headcounts.

GCC LANDSCAPE, FY2026

2,117

GCCs operating in India (across 3,728 units)

2.36 million

Professionals employed across India's GCCs

1,200+

GCCs with embedded AI/ML capability

250,000

AI professionals working inside Indian GCCs

96%

GCCs set up since FY2021 holding a product or portfolio mandate

~64%

New GCC roles in 2026 requiring AI, data or automation skills

Sources: NASSCOM-Zinnov India GCC Landscape Report 2026 [9]; foundit Insights Tracker, July 2026 [10].

AN HONEST CAVEAT

GCC hiring for FY2026 decreased by 22% from the first half to the second half of the year, due to several centers shifting existing employees to AI work, rather than hiring for AI work [9]. There is significant internal hiring happening, where employees have been re-skilled to take on new roles. Job applicants are not enough to gain an edge; job candidates need to be prepared and demonstrate that they are ready before the open positions.

SECTION 02

Why AI hiring is accelerating now

Hiring surges are usually explained after the fact by hype. This one has five identifiable drivers, each with a measurable cause behind it.

01 Enterprises moved from pilots to production

Between 2024 and 2026, AI will cease to be an experiment. Across all industries in India, **47% have multiple uses of generative AI** in production, **23% are in early adoption**, and **21% are at the proof-of-concept stage**. An additional **24% have begun utilizing Agentic AI** [11]. India is leading the world on this. **40% of Indian enterprises use AI** on a large scale, in contrast to the 28% of enterprises globally. **94% of Indian enterprises are anticipating** a rise in AI spending [12]. Production systems require a different type of employee than a system developed as a demo.

02 GCCs took ownership of the AI mandate

1,200+ Indian GCCs have an embedded AI/ML capability and have roughly **250,000 AI professionals**. **96% of these GCCs**, instituted since FY2021, have been granted a product mandate, as opposed to a support mandate [9]. When a center owns a product, it invests in architects and specialists, instead of delivery staff.

03 The data problem became the binding constraint

According to Gartner, by 2026, **60% of AI projects will be abandoned** due to the lack of AI-ready data. 63% of organizations either lack or are uncertain about the data management practices necessary beyond AI [13]. In regard to India, **78% of enterprises have cited data integration as their major technical barrier** to AI [11]. This has created demand for AI positions in data architecture. Data architecture is often the constraint, not the model. The majority of the time, the constraint is the data pipeline.

04 Regulation turned AI governance into an obligation with dates attached

For Indian enterprises, compliance is now the **top barrier to AI adoption at 39%**, over the obstacles of change resistance, cost, and infrastructure. Conversely, there was another survey measuring technical barriers in which **78% cited integration** as their biggest concern. Security and compliance controls are the top spending area to advance AI, with **68% of respondents citing control spending**. Regulatory spend will inevitably drive budget spend. With budget spend comes resources.

40%


Indian enterprises
use AI on a large scale

28%



Enterprises globally

Enterprises using AI on a large scale [12]

96%

product mandate

GCCs instituted since FY2021 [9]

60%

abandoned

78%

integration barrier

AI projects at risk [13] · Indian enterprises [11]

39%

compliance

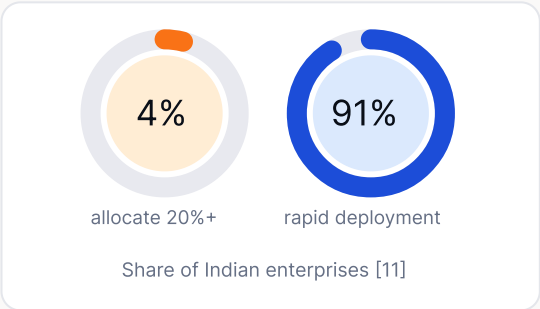
68%

control spending

Top barrier · Top spending area

05Budgets are tight, so deployment skills outrank experimentation

While enthusiasm for AI adoption is high, only **4% of Indian enterprises allocate 20% or more** of their IT budget to AI and ML. The remaining **96% allocate far less**. Almost **91% of enterprises identify rapid deployment** as the primary factor driving buy-versus-build decisions [11]. Budgets that are insufficient to fund AI deployment lead enterprises to favor roles characterized by measurable outputs. This is the primary reason why roles in the research domain, though demanded, receive far less consideration compared to production-oriented roles. It is also why enterprises are now focused on hiring experienced professionals as opposed to fresh graduates. According to recent data, almost half of the AI enterprise hires fall in the mid-level experience category as opposed to the entry-level category [17].



THE REGULATORY CALENDAR DRIVING COMPLIANCE HIRING



OBLIGATION	MILESTONE	DATE
DPDP Act - soft enforcement ends	Data Protection Board moves to active supervision	Nov 2026
DPDP Act - audit cycle begins	New framework: Mandatory independent audits and DPIAs for Significant Data Fiduciaries (SDFs)	Q1 2027
DPDP Act - full enforcement	Potential penalties will be as high as ₹250 crore	May 2027
RBI FREE-AI framework	26 recommendations: AI policy frameworks, AI audit, and model-degradation and equipment maintenance framework	Issued Aug 2025
EU AI Act - general application	Expanded duty of AI transparency for Indian GCCs aiding EU clients	Aug 2026

Sources [14][15][16]. Thresholds for Significant Data Fiduciary status explicitly include AI-based profiling – which places AI systems inside the audit perimeter rather than beside it.

Popular professional skills in India are fast gaining momentum in 2026, including prompt engineering, workflow automation, LLMops, AutoML and API integration. Four of the five tools listed in order have operations-related skills, whereas the other is more research-related.

Prompt engineering

Workflow automation

LLMops

AutoML

API integration

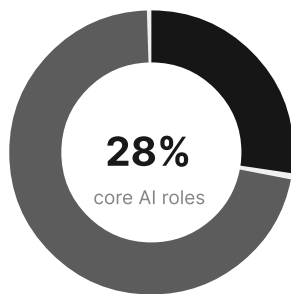
A USEFUL WAY TO READ ALL FIVE DRIVERS

None of them generates a demand for model builders. All of them create a demand for people who can build and maintain models in an enterprise, with budgets, regulators, and messy data on top.

SECTION 03

The gap between demand and supply

With an abundance of AI talent, India still lags behind other countries, and most of that talent tends to be in areas where it is most needed.

SUPPLY, AS IT STANDS**28%**

core AI roles

920,000

AI professionals in India, mid-2026

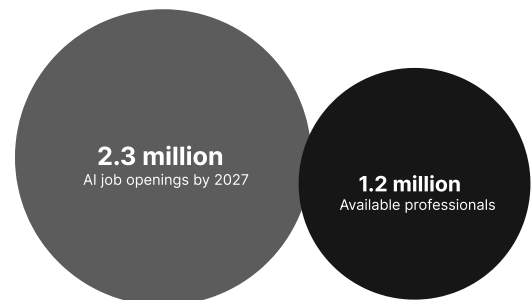
257,600

Of which in core AI roles (28%)

350,000

Active AI job postings, same period

Source: Qess Corp, India's AI Workforce Report, June 2026 [5]. The total number of India's core AI workforce is less than the number of AI positions posted.

DEMAND, AS PROJECTED**2.3 million**

AI job openings by 2027

1.2 million

Available professionals

DEMAND, AS PROJECTED**FIGURE**

AI job openings in India by 2027	2.3 million
Available AI professionals by 2027	1.2 million
Openings as a multiple of supply	1.5-2×

Source: Bain & Company [19]. Separately, NASSCOM and Deloitte India expect the talent pool to reach 1.25 million by 2027, which still indicates a deficit [20].

WHY THE PUBLISHED SHORTFALL FIGURES DIFFER – AND WHICH TO USE

Two different reputable estimates of the 2027 shortfall exist and are about twice as far apart. They don't conflict with each other; they are counting different things.

Bain & Company [19]**~1.1 million**

Implied shortfall

Job openings (2.3M) against available professionals (1.2M). Openings include replacement and duplicate requisitions, so this is an upper bound.

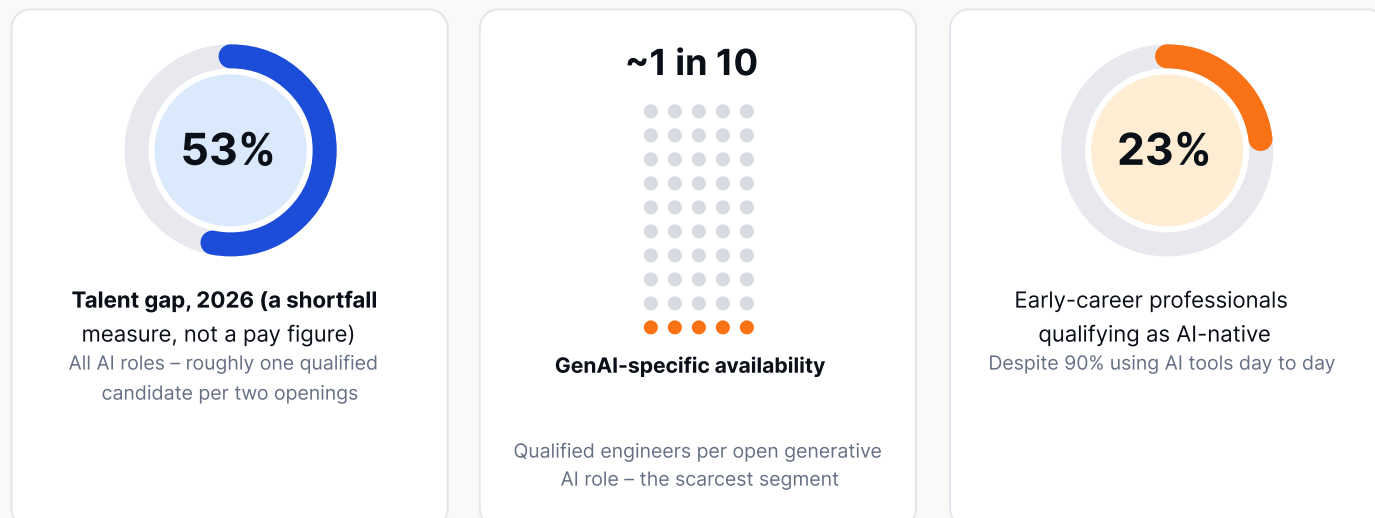
NASSCOM [21]**600,000+**

Implied shortfall

Unfilled roles – positions employers expect to be unable to staff. A narrower, more conservative measure.

In this report, the NASSCOM number was selected as the headline shortfall because the two numbers show growth in slightly different ranges. Both numbers are shown, allowing the range to be visible instead of being confused by the better of the two numbers.

TWO SEPARATE GAP MEASURES, OFTEN CONFLATED

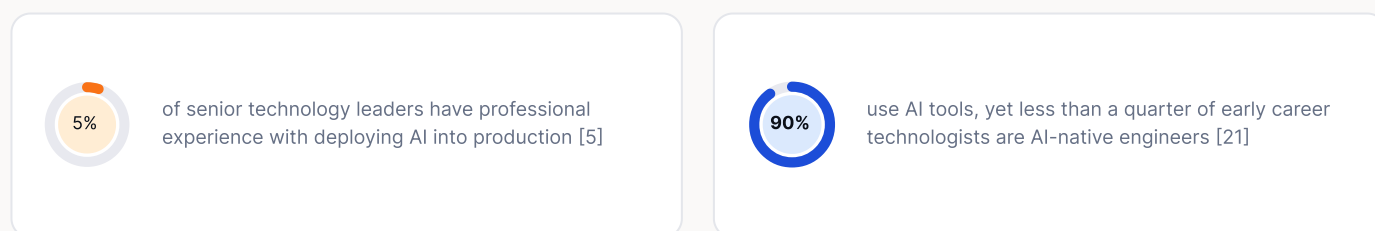


Sources: TeamLease Digital [22]; NASSCOM [21]. The 53% and 1-in-10 figures come from the same source but measure different populations and should not be merged into a single claim.

WHY THE GAP PERSISTS EVEN THOUGH INDIA HAS THE TALENT

There isn't a lack of technologists in India; there's a lack of technologists who have shipped AI. This discrepancy is present in four independently sourced datasets.

- India boasts the highest level of AI skills concentration in the world, as AI skills penetration within professional profiles is 3x higher than the rest of the world, and the country ranks second for the largest population of AI researchers globally [23]
- Between 100,000 and 200,000 of India's 2 million-plus AI-skilled professionals are skilled in advanced AI [24]
- Both estimates are measuring distinct things: around 920,000 people hold AI-centric jobs [5], while for the 2 million-plus professional profiles, AI skills are present yet do not represent employed AI professionals [24]
- 5% of the senior technology leaders have professional experience with deploying AI into production [5]
- Less than two in five companies provide large-scale AI-centric training, so the AI skills gap cannot be attributed to the employers [25]
- In spite of the fact that almost 90% use AI tools, less than a quarter of early career technologists are AI-native engineers [21]



THE CONSEQUENCE

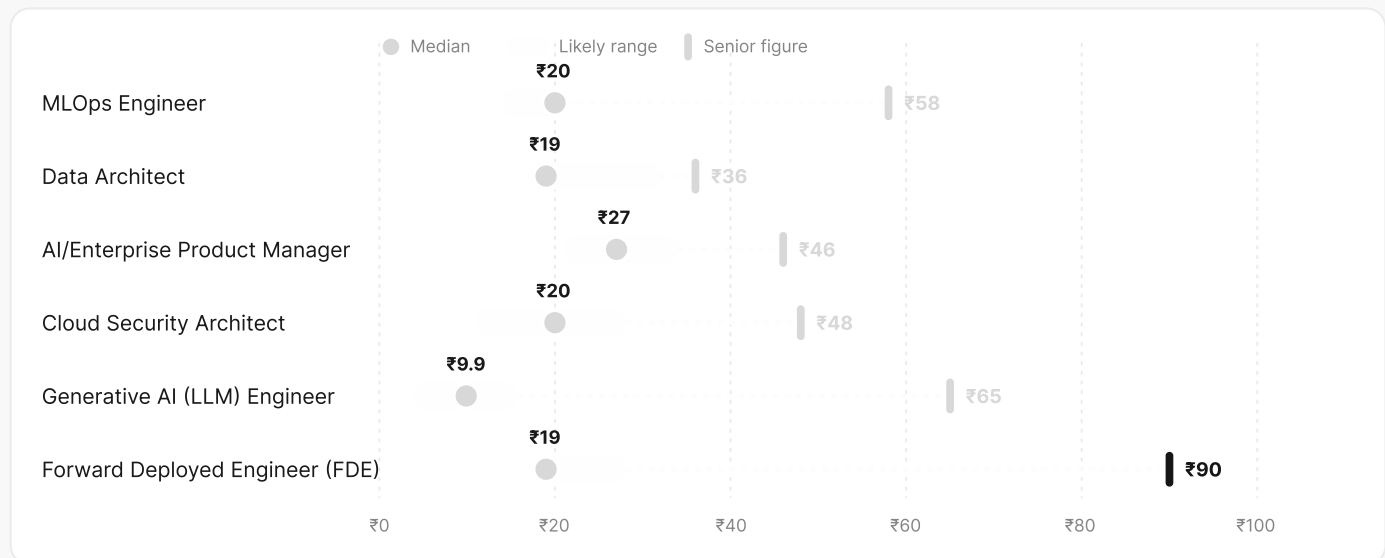
A limited, well-compensated group of people who can go from idea to implementation of an AI system, as well as keep it compliant. This section describes what is known as a band: five operational roles that can be reached from an existing technology career, rather than from a complete lack of experience.

SECTION 04

The six roles demand is concentrating into

REPORTED SALARIES BY ROLE, INDIA 2026 (₹ LPA)

ROLE	MEDIAN	LIKELY RANGE	SENIOR FIGURE	SAMPLE
MLOps Engineer	₹20.0 LPA	₹14–20 LPA	₹58 LPA	n = 50
Data Architect	₹19.0 LPA	₹17–32 LPA	₹36 LPA	n = 50
AI/Enterprise Product Manager	₹27.0 LPA	₹21–34 LPA	₹46 LPA	n = 30
Cloud Security Architect	₹20.0 LPA	₹11–28 LPA	₹48 LPA	n = 20
Generative AI (LLM) Engineer	₹9.9 LPA	₹4–15.8 LPA	₹65 LPA	n = 43
Forward Deployed Engineer (FDE)	₹19 LPA	₹18–₹28 LPA	₹90 LPA	n = 45

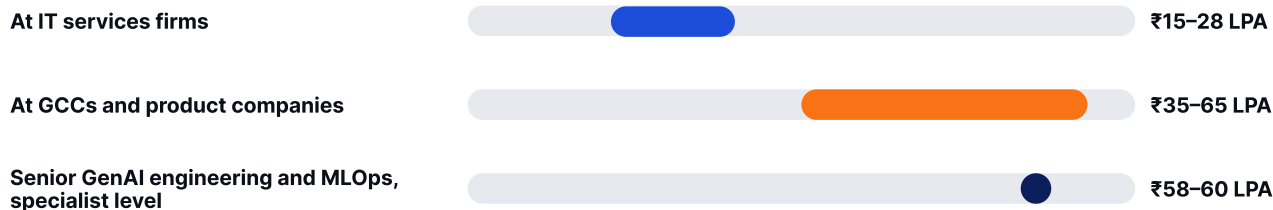


Source: Total pay from Glassdoor India, along with reported pay ranges, as of 25 August 2026 [26]. All five figures are based on the same data source and metric, so the roles should be similar. Sample sizes are small (between 20 and 50 self-reported salaries per role), and these figures are national across all types of employers. Read these figures as indicative. The range is the reported pay range, and not a strict quartile split. For MLOps, the median is at the top of the range, and for GenAI we are looking at base pay and a total pay median. Both are metric discrepancies in the source data and are not typos. The ceiling is the highest level of the credible senior band for each role: MLOps and GenAI from TeamLease Digital, the other three from the highest experience band on the same platform [26]. For MLOps, the ceiling of ₹58 LPA is the national senior-specialist figure, whereas the ceiling of ₹65 LPA for GenAI is the GCC and product-firm segment, which is above the national figure of ₹58–60 LPA for the same position [27, 35]. For the FDE role, it ranges between ₹18 – ₹28 LPA.

THE MOST IMPORTANT FINDING IN THIS REPORT

These positions have a far different salary from the national median for most positions with these titles online; GenAI Engineer, at most, is at the same level as an ML Engineer in India. That is not evidence that the opportunity is fake; that is evidence that the position is more about the experience than the title.

GENERATIVE AI / LLM ENGINEER, SENIOR · INDICATIVE BAND



Sources [27][22]. Employer-level medians on Glassdoor show the same split: one consulting firm's GenAI engineers report a median of ₹34–37 LPA, while several large IT services employers report ₹4–11 LPA for the same title [26].

THE VERIFIED PREMIUM

Roles requiring AI skills in India earn 53% more median salary than non-AI equivalents, and up to 56% more for freshers. This premium is projected to decrease to about 32% at 13 to 16 years of experience [6]. Subject to the direction of experience, the premium begins to shrink at senior levels as the comparison is against other experts.



WHAT IS MOVING THE WHOLE LADDER UPWARD

21.1%

Increment for AI/ML roles in India GCCs, 2026, against 9.8% overall

Zinnov [41]

up to 40%

Skill premium AI, GenAI and ML capability can command on base pay

EY [42]

85%+

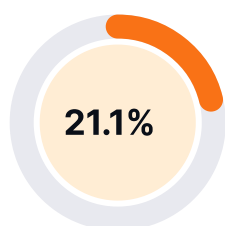
India GCCs using differentiated pay for scarce AI skills

Zinnov [41]

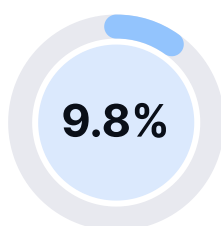
12–20%

Premium GCCs pay over IT services firms for comparable roles

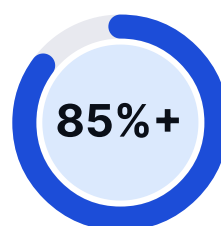
1 Finance [36]



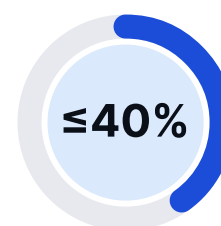
AI/ML roles, India GCCs



overall



differentiated pay



skill premium

SECTION 04 · THE FULL LADDER

Where the ceiling **actually** is

The six roles pay between **₹36 lakh and ₹90 lakh** (Indian AI compensation goes much higher). Note that such differences are achieved by significantly upgrading job responsibilities, and not by simply adding to the same job.

TIER	TYPICAL PROFILE	INDICATIVE COMPENSATION
Entry, AI & cloud	Freshers, 0–2 years	₹7–12 LPA [35]
Mid-level GenAI	3–5 years	₹25 LPA average [36]
Prompt engineering, agent design & orchestration	Mid-level, metros	₹22–35 LPA [35]
Senior IC – GenAI engineering, MLOps	8+ years, national across all employer types	₹58–60 LPA [35]
Senior GenAI engineering at GCCs and product firms	Same title, top segment only. This is the highest of the five roles in this report, and the ₹65 LPA ceiling used in the Section 04 table.	₹35–65 LPA [27]
Senior AI architect, research lead	10+ years, GCC or product firm	₹40–60+ LPA [37]
Principal / Staff engineer, Bengaluru GCC	12+ years, with a further 20–40% premium for AI and ML at the same level	₹85 LPA – ₹1.2 crore [38]
Senior IC or founding engineer, AI startups	Cash compensation; founding-engineer roles also carry equity	up to ₹1 crore [39]
Leadership hires with proven AI expertise	Function and org leadership	₹1.5 crore+ [39]
Chief AI Officer, Chief Data Officer	GCC executive tier. The top of the data science and ML market is put at a comparable ~₹2 crore [40].	₹2–2.5 crore [35]

On the two GenAI figures: The national senior figure sits around ₹58–60 LPA across all employer types. The top of the GCC/product-firm segment is ₹65 LPA. These two figures are not in competition. The second represents a smaller segment of the market, and the gap is the employer-type premium (See Section 04). Section 04 cites ₹65 LPA, as this is probably the most optimal outcome we can realistically hope for. The tiers come from several sources and cannot be construed as a single career path. Placement desk estimates [38] represent recruiters' range for the live placement and are not survey-based.

WHERE THE CRORE LINE ACTUALLY SITS – AND WHERE IT DOES NOT

Infinite numbers with a one in front of them attract a lot of attention in India. Unfortunately, awards with an Indian context, especially Indian AI, tend to be concentrated in a few areas at the executive and principal levels in large GCCs and AI start-ups. In this report, we will only examine 5 job titles as individual contributors. The two most important independent sources place the senior AI architect and engineering roles in the ₹58–65 lakh range. One source cites a salary in the ₹58–60 lakh range, while the other places the upper limit at ₹65 lakh in the GCC and product firm segments [27, 35, 37]. Any article promising that a Gen AI Engineer or Data Architect can earn ₹1 crore is describing a different job. The crore tier is a change in role, not in seniority, as one is expected to own a function, a portfolio, or an organization.

ROLE 01 OF 06

MLOps Engineer

Reported median, India – ₹20 LPA

₹20 LPA

Reported median, India

THE ROLE

This role unites machine learning, cloud and DevOps. MLOps engineers oversee the deployment, monitoring, retraining and rollback of models without impacting other services. They cover the distance from “we trained a model” to “the model is live and proven to work.”

WHY DEMAND IS RISING

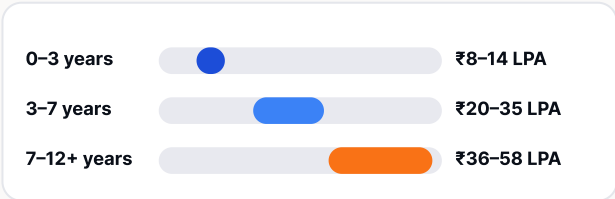
This role is a direct result of Driver 01. With 47% of Indian enterprises running multiple GenAI use cases in production [11] and budgets making up around 20% of IT spending [11], the highest in demand role is not the creation of reliable models, but the continuous improvement and measurement of model reliability. LLMOps is the third fastest-growing professional skill in India in 2026 [18].

WHO TRANSITIONS INTO IT

DevOps engineers, cloud and platform engineers, back-end engineers and data engineers. The infrastructure discipline is already in place - the new addition will be the model lifecycle: versioning, drift detection, retraining, evaluations and rollbacks.

INDICATIVE PAY

EXPERIENCE / METRIC	INDICATIVE FIGURE
0–3 years	₹8–14 LPA
3–7 years	₹20–35 LPA
7–12+ years	₹36–58 LPA



Source [28], based on recruiter salary guides. Glassdoor's national median for the title is ₹20 LPA (n=50) [26]. According to [35], Senior Specialist MLOps positions are in the range of ₹58 - 60 LPA and have around 18% annual growth. Bengaluru has an 8 - 14% premium over the rest of the country [28].

THE PAY PREMIUM OVER DEVOPS

According to a survey, MLOps jobs generally pay 17–25% more than equivalent DevOps jobs, but as a person advances to a more senior level, MLOps jobs only pay 5–13% more than DevOps jobs [28]. Large salary differentiation is seen when comparing job roles of different seniority levels and not the same job role.

THE SKILL SET THAT SEPARATES THE TWO MARKETS

Kubernetes

Docker

MLflow

Kubeflow

Airflow

Terraform

AWS SageMaker

Azure ML

CI/CD for models

Model monitoring

Drift detection

LLMOps

Feature stores

ROLE 02 OF 06

Data Architect

Median ₹19 LPA · Average ₹27 LPA

₹19 LPA ₹27 LPA

Median

Average

THE ROLE

Data architects determine how an organization manages the storage, integration, governance, and service of its data. In the context of AI, they define the substrate upon which all models rely – lineage, quality, access control and the pipelines that support training and inference.

WHY DEMAND IS RISING

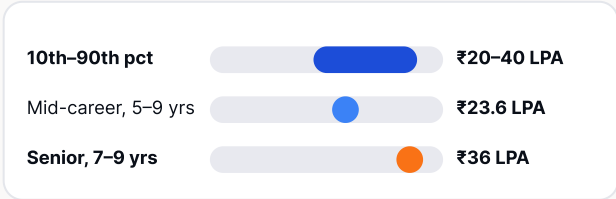
This is driver 03 formalized into a job position. Gartner estimates that until 2026, around 60% of the AI projects will be abandoned by organizations due to the lack of AI-ready data, and 63% of organizations are either unaware of or do not have the data processes AI relies on [13]. In India, 78% of enterprises consider integration the most significant technical challenge [11]. Each AI program that fails creates a data architecture opportunity.

WHO TRANSITIONS INTO IT

Data engineers, database administrators, and BI leads are the building blocks of senior analytics. The shift is from building individual pipelines to designing the system that houses those pipelines, and from the serving of reports to the serving of models.

INDICATIVE PAY

EXPERIENCE / METRIC	INDICATIVE FIGURE
PayScale India average (n=87)	₹27.3 LPA
Glassdoor India average (n=50)	₹27.0 LPA
PayScale 10th–90th percentile	₹20–40 LPA
Mid-career, 5–9 years	₹23.6 LPA
Senior, 7–9 years	₹36 LPA



Sources [26][29], accessed 25 August 2026. Why two numbers: The comparison table in section 04 uses the median (₹19 LPA) because this is the only metric for all five roles. This page uses the average (₹27 LPA) first because the average of both platforms lies within ₹0.3 LPA, making it the best approximated value in this report. The gap of ₹8 LPA, or 42%, is the highest for the five roles. The distribution is strongly skewed to the right, and a small number of more senior architects pull the average far above the center. Neither number is incorrect; they both address different questions, and the size of the gap is indeed the most important finding.

A NOTE ON CLASSIFICATION

Data Architect is not exclusively an AI role; however, it has evolved to this status given the new AI programming requirements. Additionally, most enterprise job descriptions for AI require a data architecture background that was previously more of a nice-to-have.

THE SKILL SET THAT SEPARATES THE TWO MARKETS

- SnowflakeDatabricksdbtSparkKafkaData modellingLakehouse design
- Cloud data platformsData governanceLineage & cataloguingDPDP-aware design
- Vector stores & RAG data layers

ROLE 03 OF 06

AI / Enterprise Product Manager

Reported median, India – ₹27 LPA

₹27 LPA

Reported median, India

THE ROLE

Owns the roadmap for AI-enabled products. An AI product manager can understand the capabilities and the limits of a model, create evaluation frameworks before product shipping, set the boundaries for the human-in-the-loop, and is also liable to determine whether the feature adds value, instead of a demo.

WHY DEMAND IS RISING

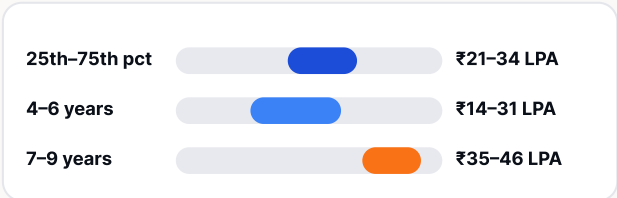
At scale, the failures will move from the technical region to the definitional, such that teams ship AI features that nobody is able to evaluate. With **86% of Indian employers** stating that AI has transformed and 35% stating that the job roles have undergone a significant change [7], the space between model capability and the requirement of the business has emerged as a different profession.

WHO TRANSITIONS INTO IT

This profession combines the skills of product managers, business analysts, technical programme managers and consultants. The additional skills required are the ability to evaluate models, design prompts and context, cost-per-inference, and the capacity to set boundaries, not learning to code.

INDICATIVE PAY

EXPERIENCE / METRIC	INDICATIVE FIGURE
Glassdoor India median (n=30)	₹27 LPA
Glassdoor India average	₹29 LPA
25th–75th percentile	₹21–34 LPA
4–6 years	₹14–31 LPA
7–9 years	₹35–46 LPA



Source [26], retrieved 25 August 2026. Sample size is small (n=30) and the experience bands are non-monotonic outside the 4–9 year range, so only those bands are shown.

AN HONEST CORRECTION

In terms of the difference between AI product managers and traditional product managers, the measured premium is roughly 5% and not the 20–50% that is typically quoted [26]. The bigger gains will be evident in what organizations will interview you for, and at what level, rather than a benefit aligned across the same role.

THE SKILL SET THAT SEPARATES THE TWO MARKETS

Model evaluation design

Prompt & context design

RAG system literacy

Unit economics of inference

Experiment design

Data product thinking

AI risk & guardrails

Human-in-the-loop design

Agentic workflow scoping

ROLE 04 OF 06

Cloud Security Architect ₹20 LPA ₹26.9 LPA

Median ₹20 LPA · Average ₹26.9 LPA

Median

Average

THE ROLE

Designs for how an enterprise defends its cloud estate: identity and access management, zero-trust architecture, workload isolation, compliance and incident response controls. Creation of these designs will encompass the data pathways for AI systems being deployed to production.

WHY DEMAND IS RISING

Designing and implementing cloud security control frameworks is the perfect entry point for most newly minted security professionals or those with a background in another field. Compliance is currently the biggest operational barrier to the widespread deployment of AI technologies at 39%, while investment in security and compliance controls is exceedingly high at 68% [12]. Indian recruiters reported an 18% year-on-year increase in information security related job postings in June 2026 [1], while more than 5,700 job advertisements in India, posted in May 2026, included the DPDP Act as a compulsory employment requirement [30].

WHO TRANSITIONS INTO IT

Network engineers, systems administrators, security analysts, and SOC Engineers. Advancement to Architect level is achieved with relevant cloud security certification (CCSP or CISSP) and a design-focused speciality over an operational focus.

INDICATIVE PAY

EXPERIENCE / METRIC	INDICATIVE FIGURE
Glassdoor India average (n=20)	₹26.9 LPA
Glassdoor India median	₹20 LPA
25th–75th percentile	₹11–28 LPA
7–9 years	₹20–31 LPA
10–14 years	₹13–48 LPA

Source [26], Accessed 25 August 2026. There are two numbers: Comparing against the median (₹20 LPA) is more relevant for all roles; the average (₹26.9 LPA) is a gap of ₹6.9 LPA (34%), which is the second-widest gap in the average-to-median for the five roles. For the Data Architect role, it is more concentrated in a handful of senior architects rather than a broad shift towards a higher average. This means the median should be viewed as the more realistic number, and the average is the long tail of the distribution, rather than the median being ₹27 LPA. This dataset has the fewest observations compared to the other four datasets (last materially updated in January 2026). There is a non-monotonic band of 10–14 years in which the lower bound (₹13 LPA) is below the 7–9 years band. This is a small sample diameter artefact, not a real pay drop. The upper bound (₹48 LPA) is shown along with Section 04, but the lower bound should be ignored. The whole row should be considered.

HOW MANY ROLES ARE ACTUALLY OPEN

According to data for the first half of 2026, there were between 4,400 and 7,400 cloud security job postings in Bengaluru [31]. There is a great deal of overlap among the different sources. The discrepancy is likely due to the varying levels of de-duplication and keyword searches. There are fewer than 400 job postings in India that mention Zero Trust specifically [30].

THE SKILL SET THAT SEPARATES THE TWO MARKETS

AWS / Azure / GCP security

IAM & privileged access

Zero-trust architecture

CSPM / CNAPP

CCSP

CISSP

Threat modelling

DPDP & RBI FREE-AI compliance

AI workload & model-endpoint security

AI governance auditing

ROLE 05 OF 06

Generative AI (LLM) Engineer

Median ₹9.9 LPA · Senior, GCC / product firm ₹35–65 LPA

₹9.9
LPA

Median

₹35–65
LPA

Senior, GCC / product firm

THE ROLE

Builds and releases applications based on large language models using retrieval-based generation pipelines, fine-tuned domain models, evaluation frameworks, and Agentic systems capable of performing multiple steps while using tools.

WHY DEMAND IS RISING

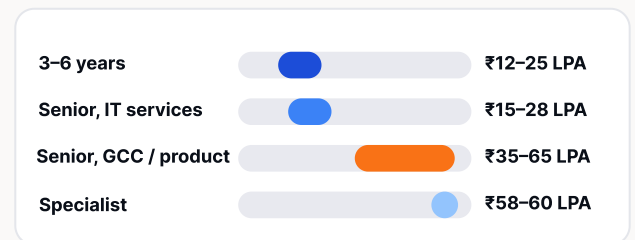
According to recent data, AI and LLM-related job postings have increased by 60% over the last year [3], while 85% of Indian tech service providers now offer Agentic AI platforms [24]. NASSCOM estimates that by 2030, Agentic AI will account for \$300-\$400 billion of additional spend [24]. There was hardly anything to offer in this area in 2023.

WHO TRANSITIONS INTO IT

Knowledge of software engineering, data science, and ML engineering, and programming experience in Python, is required. In addition, you need skills in RAG design, evaluation, context engineering, fine-tuning, and agent orchestration. These will not require additional programming experience.

INDICATIVE PAY

EXPERIENCE / METRIC	INDICATIVE FIGURE
Glassdoor India median, all employers (n=43)	₹9.9 LPA
3–6 years	₹12–25 LPA
Senior at IT services firms	₹15–28 LPA
Senior at GCCs / product firms	₹35–65 LPA
Specialist, with production deployment record	₹58–60 LPA

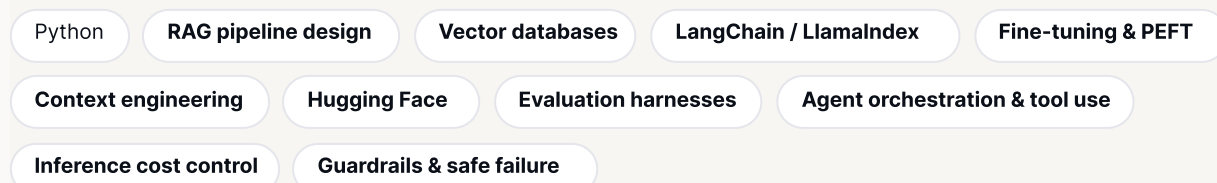


Sources [26][27][22]. The national median is low because the title is applied very broadly – including to roles that use LLM APIs rather than engineer LLM systems. This is the widest spread of any role in this report.

WHAT THE SPREAD ACTUALLY MEANS

As of 2026, "Generative AI Engineer" is a slightly less lucrative position in India than "Machine Learning Engineer" [26]. Having a position as a "Generative AI Engineer" will not increase your salary. What will increase your salary is the experience demonstrating production of an LLM system that offers safe failure behavior. While a certificate cannot provide this evidence, a project portfolio can.

THE SKILL SET THAT SEPARATES THE TWO MARKETS



ROLE 06 · SUPPLEMENTARY PROFILE

Forward Deployed Engineer (FDE)

India entry (IT services/startups) ₹18–28 LPA · Senior, global-remote AI labs ₹55–90+ LPA

THE ROLE

An **FDE (Forward Deployed Engineer)** builds, customizes, and deploys AI and software systems in the client's actual working environment (i.e. not in a generic product sandbox). While a software engineer builds a product that is used by all clients, an FDE builds and deploys a working, production-ready system within the constraints of a single customer. This position is developing rapidly as it sits at the binding constraint identified in this report: deploying and operating systems, as opposed to model building.

WHY DEMAND IS RISING

There was an **800% increase in job postings** for Forward Deployed Engineers in the US from January to September 2025 and a **1,165% increase** year over year, but the pool of qualified candidates grew by just 50% in that same time period [44]. In India, in 2025, unemployment wreaked havoc on the tech employment landscape, with more than 115,000 global tech jobs being cut, but job postings for the role increased by about **729% year-on-year**, and by mid 2026, Forward Deployed Engineer was the top searched job title on LinkedIn in the country [45]. In May 2026, OpenAI started its subsidiary, OpenAI Deployment Company, with more than \$4 billion in funding, built to provide Forward Deployed Engineers to companies. It also acquired Tomoro and, as a result, hired over 150 Forward Deployed Engineers [46]. Even the consulting sector has started to follow the trend. QuantumBlack, a subsidiary of McKinsey, posts Forward Deployed Engineer jobs at the Principal level in Bengaluru, along with BCG X hiring Forward Deployed AI Engineer positions across Mumbai and Gurugram [47].

+729%

job postings for the role increased by about 729% year-on-year, India [45]

+1,165%

increase year over year, US [44]

+800%

increase in job postings, US, January to September 2025 [44]

50%

growth of the pool of qualified candidates in that same time period [44]

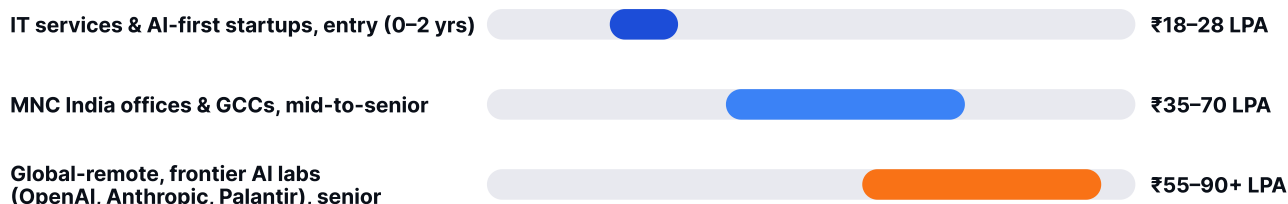
\$4 billion

OpenAI Deployment Company funding, May 2026 [46]

150+

Forward Deployed Engineers hired via the Tomoro acquisition [46]

INDICATIVE PAY, BY EMPLOYER TIER (INDIA)



Sources: the hiring-growth data of Paraform and Live Data Technologies, Indeed and Times of India, OpenAI, salary trackers of recruiters (Glassdoor India, TeamLease, and independent FDE-focused hiring desks), compiled in mid-2026. Compared to the other five roles for which more data is available, this small and relatively new dataset has not been checked against a second independent platform the way the other salary data in this report has been checked. Thus, this data is directional and should be interpreted with caution, as per the treatment given in this report.

INDICATIVE PAY, BY EMPLOYER TIER (INDIA)

EMPLOYER TIER / EXPERIENCE	INDICATIVE FIGURE
IT services & AI-first startups, entry (0–2 yrs)	₹18–28 LPA
MNC India offices & GCCs, mid-to-senior	₹35–70 LPA
Global-remote, frontier AI labs (OpenAI, Anthropic, Palantir), senior	₹55–90+ LPA

LEARNBAY'S NEWLY LAUNCHED FDE COURSE

Learnbay created a new Forward Deployed Engineer (FDE) course that follows the project-based weekend model with applied AI skills. It equips professionals with the skills needed to apply for GenAI integration, production deployment, and client-facing delivery roles. Similar to the findings of this report, Learnbay provides placement assistance for this course and does not guarantee any job.

WHO TRANSITIONS INTO IT

Backend, full-stack and platform engineers with production experience, and solutions architects and client-facing technical consultants. Experience with additive technologies such as GenAI and agentic tools, along with the ability to work in ambiguity and scope a solution directly with a non-technical stakeholder. We focus on empowering engineers with the additive skills to successfully work with emerging technologies, and not on training them in core computing fundamentals.

THE SKILL SET THAT SEPARATES THE TWO MARKETS

Production-grade full-stack/backend engineering

Applied GenAI & LLM integration

RAG & Agentic frameworks (LangGraph, MCP-based tooling)

Cloud platforms (AWS/Azure/GCP)

Client-facing solution scoping

Domain & compliance awareness

Ambiguity tolerance & rapid prototyping

BUILD THIS HANDS-ON

Build & deploy production AI systems in 12 months

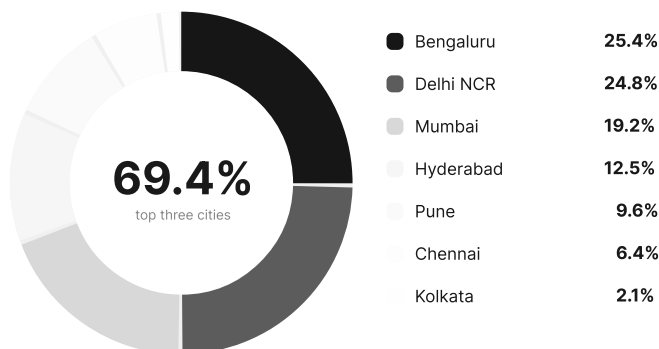
Master GenAI, RAG, agents, cloud, LLMOps and client solution engineering – live, with hands-on projects.

[Explore the FDE Program →](#)

SECTION 05

Where the jobs are

SHARE OF INDIA'S ACTIVE AI JOB POSTINGS

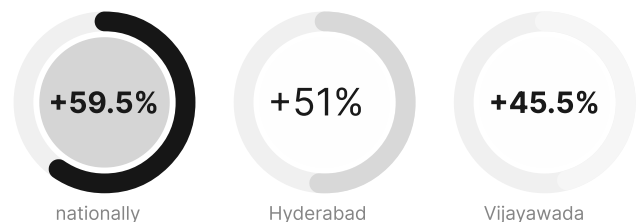


CIT Y	SHARE OF INDIA'S ACT IVE AI JOB POST INGS
Bengaluru	25.4%
Delhi NCR	24.8%
Mumbai	19.2%
Hyderabad	12.5%
Pune	9.6%
Chennai	6.4%
Kolkata	2.1%

Source: CBRE analysis of 64,500+ AI-tagged listings on Naukri.com for December 2025, published February 2026 [32]. Bengaluru, Delhi NCR, and Mumbai together hold 69.4% of India's AI job postings. These are shares of listings on one platform and not of the total Indian AI labour market.

SHARE AND GROWTH ARE DIFFERENT QUESTIONS

Here is where the roles are currently situated. Established hubs contain most roles, and a lot of people do not even consider Mumbai's 19.2% when talking about Bengaluru and Hyderabad. Growth data is different; year-on-year growth for AI engineering job postings is +51% in Hyderabad and +45.5% in Vijayawada, and +59.5% nationally. Tier 2 cities are small, but they are growing quite rapidly.



THE INFRASTRUCTURE BEHIND THE MAP

According to projections, the total capacity of India's data centers is expected to reach 6.5 GW by 2030 from about 1.5 GW in 2021, with AI workloads accounting for around 30% of that capacity [33]. Some notable commitments for that construction include Microsoft's announcement of a \$17.5 billion commitment to cloud and AI infrastructure in India for the operations and skills development in CY2026-29; Google's commitment of \$15 billion for the Visakhapatnam AI hub for 2026-30; and an additional \$13 billion from AWS for Mumbai and Hyderabad, bringing Amazon's total AI infrastructure commitment for 2026-30 to \$21 billion [43]. It is expected that about 100,000 professionals will be needed to fill these roles by 2030; however, only 15-20% of applicants actually possess the necessary skills. Most of the construction is happening outside the established hubs, which is what makes the new map.

6.5 GW

total capacity of

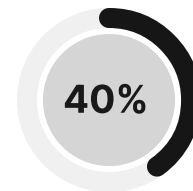
**\$17.5
billion****\$15
billion****\$21
billion**

SECTION 06

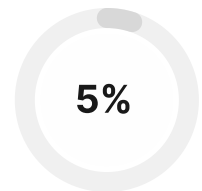
The barrier is time, not aptitude

The best candidates for these five positions are currently employed. They are engineers and consultants with roughly two to fifteen years' experience. Hiring is focused between four to ten years of experience [17]. This same group is least likely to be able to commit to a full-time program, a rigid weekday schedule, or a significant absence from the workforce.

The data is consistent. It shows the gap is not being closed through employment. Less than two out of five companies offer large-scale AI training [25]. Of the two million-plus AI-skilled professionals in India, only 100,000 to 200,000 have had anything more than basic AI training [24]. Also, only 5% of senior technology leaders have extensive experience deploying AI in production [5].



employers



senior tech leaders

40% of employers ask for AI skills and certifications more than formal degrees [7] · 5% have extensive experience deploying AI in production [5]

“

Employers don't require academic degrees anymore. Now, 40% of employers ask for AI skills and certifications more than formal degrees, but the evidence has to be provided, which makes that preference a more difficult standard than a completion certificate.

INDEED – NASSCOM, INDIA'S AI TALENT INFLECTION POINT, MAY 2026 · SOURCE [7]

LEARN BY SHIPPING

Gain practical experience with real-world projectsPRACTICAL
SKILLSPROJECT
LIFE CYCLELEAD A
TEAMINDUSTRY
KNOWLEDGE[Explore All Projects →](#)

WHAT LEARNBAY DOES ABOUT IT

A programme built around the constraint, not around the curriculum

ELEMENT	WHAT IT MEANS IN PRACTICE
Weekend delivery	Live sessions are conveniently scheduled outside of work hours to allow working professionals to pursue their career growth outside of their primary source of income. The 9-month Generative AI and Agentic AI Master Program for Working Professionals is designed with this in mind.
Applied projects	The final product is a portfolio. Utilization of the AI Co-Lab Experience will provide an opportunity to work on projects that relate to the systems described on the role pages of this report: RAG pipelines, deployment and monitoring, evaluation, governance-aware data design, etc.
Structured career support	Instead of providing general job-related support, the mentoring program focuses on helping each participant develop a capability to apply for, and successfully interview for, one of the five roles. This is done in collaboration with Microsoft (for interviewing) and IBM (for project work).

A NOTE ON OUTCOMES

No program can guarantee a job or a certain salary. Employers make the final decision about hiring, and there are many factors that affect the results of an individual's efforts, as well as their background and the economic condition of the job market. Despite this, Learnbay offers placement assistance. What a good weekend program can offer is capability, a project portfolio, and mentorship. Based on what employers are actually screening for, as evidenced in this report, this seems to be sufficient.

BUILD THIS HANDS-ON

Ship a production RAG system in 9 months

The GenAI & Agentic AI Master Program covers retrieval, fine-tuning, agents and LLMOps – live, with two domain specializations.

Explore the program →

SECTION 07

Questions professionals keep asking

Q Which of these six roles pays the most?

The ranking of the two orders depends entirely on whether you mean this year or in 8 years, since the two orders are nearly opposites. Here's the ranking after 8 years: AI/Enterprise Product Manager (1st), Generative AI (LLM) Engineer (2nd), Data Architect (3rd), MLOps Engineer (4th), Cloud Security Architect (5th). In addition, the FDE role is trending right now and about to change the hiring trends in the near future. Here's the ranking after 8 years from a senior perspective: Cloud Security Architect (1st), MLOps Engineer (2nd), Data Architect (3rd), AI/Enterprise Product Manager (4th), Generative AI (LLM) Engineer (5th). Medians and three lower ceilings from Glassdoor India, retrieved 25 August 2026 [26]; MLOps and GenAI ceilings from TeamLease Digital and GCC/product-firm bands [27, 35]. The highest median of the roles is the lowest ceiling, where the median is the breadth of the title and the ceiling is what production experience is worth. Focus on what you can reach to the highest degree, and not what you start from. Because the information in the Full Ladder table in Section 04 describes the ranking of the ladder going above these numbers, I left it for later.

RANKING AFTER 8 YEARS

1. AI/Enterprise Product Manager
2. Generative AI (LLM) Engineer
3. Data Architect
4. MLOps Engineer
5. Cloud Security Architect

RANKING AFTER 8 YEARS FROM A SENIOR PERSPECTIVE

1. Cloud Security Architect
2. MLOps Engineer
3. Data Architect
4. AI/Enterprise Product Manager
5. Generative AI (LLM) Engineer

Q The salary figures here are lower than what I see elsewhere. Why?

Most published statistics for these roles give average 'ceiling' figures, or quote marketing stats which have no primary basis behind them. This report uses a single metric and a single platform and gives a comparison table so that the roles can be fairly compared, and gives a rough estimate of the sample size for each. Small samples are a limitation, and we've admitted this, rather than presenting a 'smoother' image for the statistics.

Q If AI is automating jobs, is this demand durable?

Two phenomena occur at the same time. Current estimates show that about 55% of the work mix in GCC work portfolios is susceptible to AI displacement in the context of commodity and routine tasks [34]. The work in this report falls in the other category and includes design, deployment, and governance and accountability tasks. For these reasons, the same organizations are saying that they are reducing procedural roles while also saying that AI skills are the hardest skills to hire for [4].

Q Can a working professional transition without quitting?

The data shows that it is the more probable route. Mid-level professionals making up the majority of new hires in AI (4 to 10 years' experience) now comprise 50% of the hiring pool [17]. Moreover, many of the GCC AI positions are being filled through internal job reassignments [9]. Both of these phenomena support individuals who develop their skills through employment over individuals who opt to leave their employment to pursue training.



55% of the work mix in GCC work portfolios is susceptible to AI displacement in the context of commodity and routine tasks [34]



50% Mid-level professionals (4 to 10 years' experience) now comprise 50% of the hiring pool [17]

Q Is a certification enough on its own?

No. Forty per cent of employers claim to favour demonstrable skills and certifications over degrees, but the word to focus on here is 'demonstrable' [7]. For all five roles, a candidate's experience in deploying a solution to production closes the median and upper band pay gap. While earning your certificate may get you an interview, a portfolio is the difference-maker when you walk in.

Q Which role should I target?

According to your current stack, DevOps, cloud, or platform engineering could take you to MLOps or specialized cloud security. Data engineering or BI can somewhat lead to Data Architecture. Product, consulting or business analysis could take you to AI/Enterprise Product Management. Python-fluent engineering or data science also leads to GenAI/LLM engineering.

WHICH ROLE SHOULD I TARGET? – BY CURRENT STACK

YOUR CURRENT STACK		ROLE TO TARGET
DevOps, cloud, or platform engineering	→	MLOps or specialized cloud security
Data engineering or BI	→	Data Architecture
Product, consulting or business analysis	→	AI/Enterprise Product Management
Python-fluent engineering or data science	→	GenAI/LLM engineering

Q Is a Forward Deployed Engineer a real position, and does Learnbay have a course for it?

Yes. There was a 729% increase in FDE postings in India last year. Also, in May 2023, OpenAI started its \$4 billion Deployment Company, showing frontier AI labs now consider FDE a core hiring position rather than a niche position. Because it is a newer, less standardized role, we have treated it as a supplementary profile. Learnbay has introduced an FDE Course. They have added this course in the same project-based format as the other main courses. This new course aims to target professionals eager to pursue a career in today's client-facing AI-first tech roles.

SECTION 07 · SOURCES & METHODOLOGY

The data behind this report

METHODOLOGY

This report compiles data from publicly available labor market sources. They are primarily from the period of November 2025 to August 2026, with a few baseline sources from August 2024. All the figures are footnoted. I present two sources even when there are discrepancies. When a claim circulated without attribution, I chose to eliminate it rather than cite it. This was especially the case with several salary and job count figures which circulated with no attribution. The salary data was collected on the 25th of August, 2026. The salary figures reported by platforms are self-reported, and sample sizes are stated and should be seen as self-reported indicative salary figures, rather than offers. Regulatory references are to requirements either in force or scheduled to come into force by August 2026.

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Which of the six roles is closest to your background?

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