

The missing jobs

Not even a tenth of the 30.67 lakh youth who had received or were undergoing training under the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) as on early-July have obtained job placement offers, according to a report in this newspaper. The percentage could be even lower if actual placements, as opposed to offers, are taken. So, can this be seen as a failure of the [Narendra Modi](#) government's flagship skills training and certification scheme? Jobs are not simply a function of the country's workforce acquiring formal skills making them employable. More fundamental to job creation is a vibrant economy, in which investment and consumption fuel demand for labour, skilled and unskilled. We did see this happen, for instance, between 2004-05 and 2011-12. During that period, an estimated 52 million non-farm jobs were created, nearly half in construction and the rest in the services and manufacturing sectors. Today's crisis is not one of employability, but of investment and economic activity leading to shrinking job opportunities, whether for IT service professionals, draughtsmen, masons or fitters.

The problem with PMKVY is not its poor job placement record. The question to ask is whether a scheme of this kind - seeking to impart industry-relevant skill training to 10 million youth over four years (2016-2020), largely through private accredited "training partners" and with the Centre meeting the entire fee expenses - is required at all. Ideally, the government's focus should be on providing decent education. That would mean ensuring minimum standards in schools, colleges, polytechnics and industrial training institutes (ITI). If just over 43 per cent of class VIII students in rural government schools can solve three-digit by one-digit division problems and only 45 per cent are able to read simple sentences in English - as the NGO Pratham's Annual State of Education Report for 2016 reveals - that's what needs fixing. Training of broadband and mobile handset repair technicians, CNC machine operators, customer care executives, air hostesses or beauticians are better left to the private sector. The Rs 12,000-crore outlay for PMKVY - mainly towards training modules of 150-300 hours duration, whose utility is doubtful - can instead be used to beef up the infrastructure and course content in 2,284 government ITIs.

This is not to say that formal skilling - currently restricted to hardly three per cent of India's workforce - isn't important. But skills are mostly job-specific and acquired at the workplace. The government would do a great job by just concentrating on basic education, labour reforms and improving the ease of doing business. The market has ways to address skills gap: You don't need PMKVY or a ministry of skills development for that.

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