Terms of Reference

Market Research: AI Impact, Employability, and Career Outcomes among Tier 2 and Tier 3 Learners in India

Release Date: 26th June 2026

Background

Opportunity International EduFinance, through its Education Financial Products (EFP) programme, works with partner financial institutions (FIs) to expand access to affordable, quality education through tailored Education Finance products. These include School Improvement Loans, School Fee Loans, and other instruments designed to address financial barriers across the education ecosystem.

As part of this work, Opportunity International is supporting the scaling of skill loan business lending to meet growing demand from students from low- and middle-income communities across Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities in India. As the labour market evolves, there is a need to better understand how Artificial Intelligence (AI) is reshaping employability, job roles, skills demand, and career pathways, particularly for learners entering the workforce through vocational, technical, and professional education pathways.

The purpose of this assignment is to generate actionable market intelligence that will support the development of sustainable and employability-linked lending strategies. **The assessment should bridge global evidence on AI and labour market trends with the realities of India's Tier 2 and Tier 3 skilling ecosystem to identify future-ready learner segments, resilient career pathways, and opportunities for strategic partnerships.**

The findings will inform decision-making related to:

- Loan product strategy
- Employability-linked risk assessment
- Institutional partnership strategies
- Identification of priority courses, geographies, and learner segments for future expansion

Objectives

The study seeks to:

- Assess how AI is impacting employability, job roles, and skills demand across key education and employment categories.

- Understand learner preferences towards AI-related courses, placement rates, job opportunities, salary trends, and career trajectories of Tier 2 and Tier 3 graduates.
- Identify future-ready skills, programmes, and learner segments likely to remain resilient in an AI-enabled labour market.
- Identify opportunities and risks associated with different skilling pathways and their implications for education financing.
- Translate findings into practical recommendations for loan product strategy, risk assessment, and institutional partnerships.

Scope of Work

Conduct a comprehensive literature review and secondary data analysis to assess how Artificial Intelligence (AI) and broader labour market trends are likely to influence the future relevance and employability outlook of vocational skilling pathways in India, with a specific focus on Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities. The assessment should focus exclusively on the vocational training segment and should not include higher education programmes.

The consultant may utilise international, national, and industry-specific sources, including labour market studies, government publications, industry reports, and existing datasets that can be found online or those provided by Opportunity.

The secondary research should include, at a minimum:

- Research design and analytical framework
  - Propose and justify the analytical approach, including the unit of analysis (e.g. sectors, occupations, skilling pathways, or programmes).
  - Describe how the evidence will be synthesised and translated into actionable recommendations for education financing.
- Identification of priority focus areas
  - Develop a methodology to identify and narrow down a manageable number of priority focus areas for detailed assessment.
  - Clearly justify the rationale and criteria used for prioritisation.
- Labour market and AI assessment
  - Assess how AI and broader labour market trends are expected to impact the shortlisted focus areas over the next 3–5 years.
  - Identify emerging employer expectations, future-ready skills, and competencies required across the shortlisted focus areas.
  - Assess whether demand for each shortlisted focus area is expected to increase, remain stable, or decline.

- Employability assessment
    - Analyse employability outcomes associated with the shortlisted focus areas, including placement rates, employment outcomes, salary trajectories, career progression pathways, and geographic differences across Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities.
- Institutional and learner landscape
    - Assess institutional readiness, learner preferences, and barriers to accessing high-potential skilling pathways.
    - Identify curriculum gaps and opportunities to strengthen alignment with future labour market needs.
- Lending landscape assessment
    - Compile lending-relevant information associated with the shortlisted focus areas, including course costs, programme duration, financing needs, expected return on investment, and other variables that may inform future student lending decisions.

The findings from the secondary research should be synthesised into an evidence-based assessment that directly informs the Executive Decision Matrix, strategic recommendations and other outputs mentioned below for future employability-linked lending.

Expected Outputs

Output	Description	Key Questions Answered
Employability Risk Matrix	An evidence-based assessment of priority skilling pathways, considering future labour market relevance, skills demand, employability outlook, salary prospects and Tier 2/3 relevance.	Which skilling pathways are likely to remain resilient, and which may become increasingly vulnerable over the next 3–5 years?
Employability-linked Underwriting Signals	Identification of indicators that may strengthen lending decisions, such as placement rates, salary trajectories, employer demand, skills relevance, and institutional characteristics.	What indicators should be incorporated into employability-linked risk assessment and underwriting processes?
Partnership Roadmap	Recommendations for strategic partnerships with institutions, employers, placement ecosystems, and workforce development organisations.	Which ecosystem actors should be prioritised to strengthen graduate

		outcomes and support portfolio growth?
Strategic Recommendations	Practical recommendations to inform product design, risk management, and future expansion strategies, including assumptions and limitations where applicable.	How should the findings be translated into lending strategies and operational decisions?
Executive Decision Matrix	A summary framework that consolidates findings into a single decision-making tool to support prioritisation.	Where should future investments and portfolio expansion efforts be concentrated?

Deliverables

The Market Research Firm will deliver the following:

- Inception report and analytical framework
- Secondary research summary
- Interim findings presentation
- Final report
- Clean datasets and supporting documentation
- Methodological annex

Indicative Workplan and Level of Effort

Consultants are requested to propose an indicative workplan outlining:

- Project phases
- Estimated duration for each phase
- Total level of effort (working days)
- Key milestones
- Assumptions and dependencies

Opportunity International will work with the selected consultant to finalise implementation timelines upon award of the assignment.

Selection of Consultant

To select the consultant(s), for each assignment the technical and financial proposal will be assessed together, using the following assessment tool:

Element	Available points
Technical proposal:	*70*

- Understanding of the terms of reference	10
- Methodology and framework	*20*
- Approach to evidence synthesis and strategic recommendations	*15*
- Qualification and relevant experience	*15*
- Workplan and deliverables	10
Financial proposal:	*30*
- Total costs (most points for lowest reasonable offer)	27
- Clarity of the financial proposal	*3*
Total	*100*

Submission Guidelines

Please submit a concise proposal (no more than 10 pages). Please also include a brief workplan with key deliverables, a short profile of the lead consultant, and a financial proposal (daily rates, output-based fees, or total project cost). Finally, add any recommendations you have for strengthening the assignment. We are looking for a crisp, focused proposal that covers only the essential information.

Please submit your complete proposal to Jasmine Trang (jtrang@opportunity.org) and Divya Behl (dbehl@opportunity.org) by 6 July2026.