Eastern India's role in the next GCC wave

From Scale to Intelligence
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Contents

Executive summary

Global Capability Centers (GCCs) in India are at an inflection point. Once anchored primarily in cost efficiency and scale, they are now being reshaped by rapid advances in AI, rising expectations for enterprise value creation, and the need for more resilient, distributed operating models. As global organizations rethink how work is designed, governed and delivered, GCCs are evolving into Intelligent GCCs – AI-enabled, data-driven and designed to influence strategy, innovation and decision-making across the enterprise.

This report examines the emergence of Intelligent GCCs and the structural shifts enabling this transition, including AI-led operating models, multi-functional hubs and enterprise-wide transformation roles. It also explores sectoral expansion, geographic diversification beyond Tier-1 cities, and the operating characteristics that differentiate high-impact GCCs from scale-driven delivery centers.

Within this context, the report focuses on Eastern India, with a specific lens on Kolkata, as an emerging GCC destination aligned to the Intelligent GCC model. Drawing on EY GCC Pulse Survey 2025 insights, ecosystem analysis and GCC leader perspectives, it assesses how structural cost advantages, a growing multinational GCC presence, strong academic institutions, and supportive state-level policies are positioning the region as a credible complement to traditional Tier-1 hubs, particularly for analytics, AI-enabled operations and capability-led centers.

Key findings include

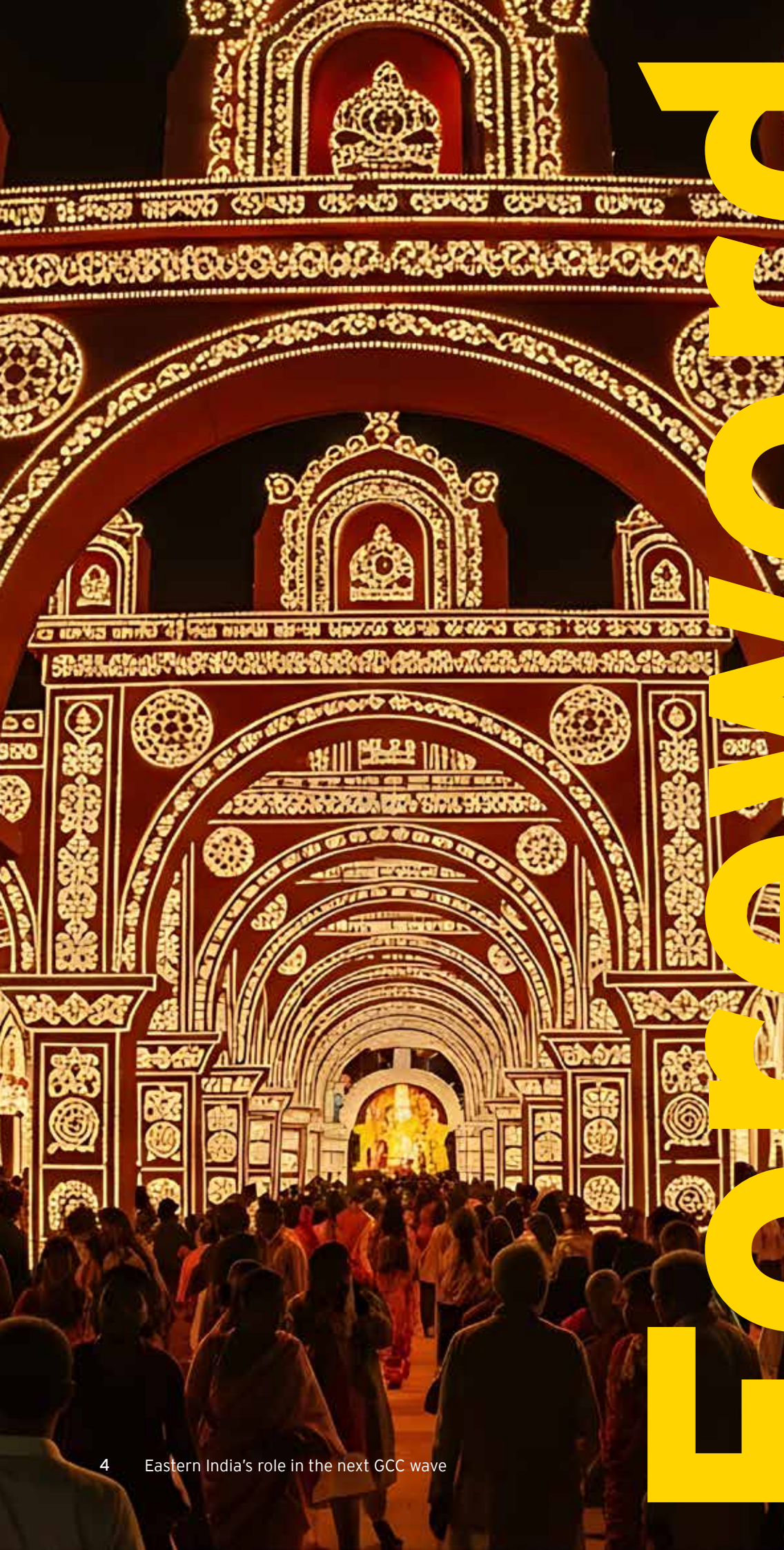| **Strategic evolution:**	**AI-led inflection:**	**Talent transformation:**	**Geographic shift:**	**Challenges:**
92% of GCC leaders confirm their centers now drive transformation beyond cost arbitrage, with mandates expanding into IP creation, advanced analytics and AI adoption.	Over 80% of GCCs are scaling Generative AI, while 58% invest in Agentic AI, signaling a decisive move from experimentation to execution.	Workforce reskilling (71%) and hybrid human-AI collaboration models are central to scaling Intelligent GCCs, alongside emerging roles in AI governance and orchestration.	Emerging hubs such as Kolkata, Ahmedabad, Jaipur, among others are gaining traction, driven by cost-talent dynamics and state-level incentives.	Talent shortages in niche skills, rising costs, and limited leadership localization (80% of GCCs have <10% leadership roles in India) remain critical hurdles.

The next decade will be defined by Intelligent GCCs - AI-native, data-driven, and governed for trust and resilience. Success will depend on embedding AI at scale, reimagining operating models, and building globally ready leadership pipelines. India's structural advantages –deep talent, enabling policies, and a collaborative ecosystem –position it to lead this transformation, while emerging locations like Kolkata offer new levers for resilience and growth.

Foreword

India's GCCs have entered a decisive new phase. What began as a cost-arbitrage model has evolved into a sophisticated engine for innovation, product development and enterprise transformation. Today, GCCs own mandates across AI, analytics, customer experience, engineering, finance and large-scale modernization programs. They are no longer peripheral delivery extensions; they are integral to how global organizations design, build and scale businesses.

This shift is underpinned by India's unique advantages – deep STEM talent, strong digital maturity, scalable infrastructure and a stable policy environment. Importantly, growth is now geographically broader. Value creation is emerging from both tier-1 hubs and newer locations that offer resilience, talent diversity and operating leverage. With India hosting close to half of the world's GCCs, no other geography provides comparable scale, capability breadth and ecosystem maturity.

On this evolving map, Kolkata is turning into a viable strategic selection. Strengthening infrastructure, IT parks in Sector V and New Town, university linkages and proactive state initiatives are helping the city attract higher-value mandates. With GCCs worldwide altering their purpose, Kolkata is set to make a significant contribution to future growth.

Mr. Pulak Chamaria,
Chairman- IT Sub Council, Assocham Eastern Region Development Council

2025 marked an important milestone in the evolution of India's GCCs. Momentum remained strong on two fronts - new center establishments and the steady expansion of existing hubs. Growth has been particularly pronounced in sectors such as life sciences, energy and retail, while the emergence of mega GCCs with more than 5,000 employees, alongside fast-scaling mid-market centers, is reshaping how global enterprises design and support work from India.

The nature of value creation within GCCs is also changing. AI has moved firmly beyond pilot programs into day-to-day operations, with use cases now delivering measurable improvements in productivity, cycle times and decision quality. Findings from the EY GCC Pulse Survey 2025 highlight that GCCs are actively upskilling their teams on Generative AI and are investing in agentic AI capabilities, signaling that scaled AI adoption is quickly becoming mainstream. This change elevates leadership, governance, and workforce readiness as organizations aim to integrate AI ethically and swiftly.

At the same time, the GCC footprint is becoming geographically broader. As enterprises diversify beyond traditional hubs, emerging locations are gaining strategic importance. Kolkata is steadily positioning itself as one such center of gravity - well-connected globally, supported by capabilities across IT, engineering and business process management, and benefiting from an infrastructure base that continues to strengthen. Kolkata offers a deep, cost-effective and loyal talent pool from premier institutions, making it ideal for scalable GCCs across finance, analytics, digital operations and risk with significantly lower attrition than Tier-1 hubs.

Looking ahead to 2026 and beyond, growth is expected to remain resilient. Intelligent GCCs – AI-enabled, data-driven and human-advised – will increasingly define the operating model of the future. In this journey, cities such as Kolkata will play an important role in enabling scalable, resilient and innovation-led operations, reinforcing India's standing as the world's most significant hubs for enterprise value creation.

Arindam Sen,
Partner and GCC Sector Leader - Technology, Media and Entertainment and Telecommunications, EY India

GCC sector overview

Shift from cost engines to innovation orchestrators

India's GCC ecosystem is undergoing a fundamental shift in purpose and positioning, with GCCs evolving into innovation orchestrators –driving IP creation, advanced analytics, AI adoption and large-scale transformation initiatives for global organizations.[1]

Today, India hosts over 1,760 GCCs, employing close to two million professionals and contributing significantly to global enterprise operations. This scale is underpinned by India's deep STEM talent base (accounting for 28% of the global STEM workforce[2]), a maturing technology ecosystem, improving infrastructure, and a policy environment that continues to support long-term investment. Looking ahead, the GCC market in India is expected to expand meaningfully by the end of the decade, reinforcing the country's position as the world's most strategic GCC destination.

Location dynamics: Beyond traditional hubs

While Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Chennai, Pune, Mumbai and Delhi NCR remain dominant GCC hubs, enterprise location strategies are clearly diversifying. Organizations are increasingly exploring emerging cities to balance cost, talent availability, resilience and scalability.

Cities such as Kolkata, Ahmedabad, Jaipur, Vadodara, Chandigarh, Indore, Bhubaneswar, Visakhapatnam, Coimbatore and Kochi are gaining traction, driven by targeted state policies, improving infrastructure, and favorable cost-talent dynamics. This shift marks a new phase in India's GCC evolution – one that is more geographically distributed and structurally resilient.

Eastern India and Kolkata's emerging role

Eastern India, with Kolkata at its core, is moving from emerging potential to strategic relevance within India's GCC landscape. What was once viewed as an alternative delivery location is increasingly being integrated into enterprise-level location strategies as organizations seek to diversify risk, access scalable talent and design future-ready GCCs. Kolkata's expanding IT and ITeS talent base, combined with growing depth across IT, engineering, analytics and BPM, has enabled the city to support more complex, intelligence-led mandates.

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1. *EY GCC Pulse Survey 2025*
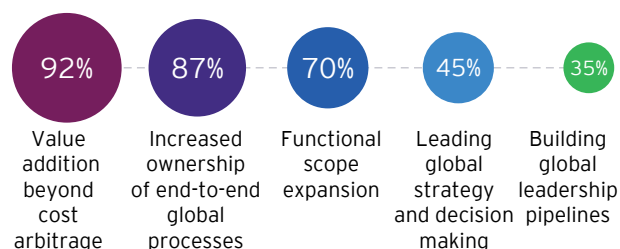2. *Economic Survey 2024-25*

Sectoral expansion and capability depth

While IT and IT-enabled services remain foundational, GCC growth is accelerating across BFSI, healthcare, life sciences, engineering, telecom, media and retail. Notably, aerospace, defense, semiconductors, clean energy and advanced R&D-focused GCCs are scaling faster than the overall market, highlighting a decisive shift toward deep-tech and innovation-led mandates.

GCCs are also becoming increasingly multi-functional. While IT, finance and HR remain strong, there is a growing focus towards core industry functions such as Engineering, Research & Development (ER&D), store operations, merchandising and drug discovery, alongside enablement functions such as AI, data analytics, customer interaction, risk, marketing and legal. This highlights a shift toward innovation-led and knowledge-intensive work to unlock greater value and potential. Survey data also shows that 92% of GCC leaders believe their centers now drive enterprise-wide transformation beyond cost arbitrage.[1]

Strategic mandate of GCCs in the next 12 months (EY GCC Pulse Survey 2025)

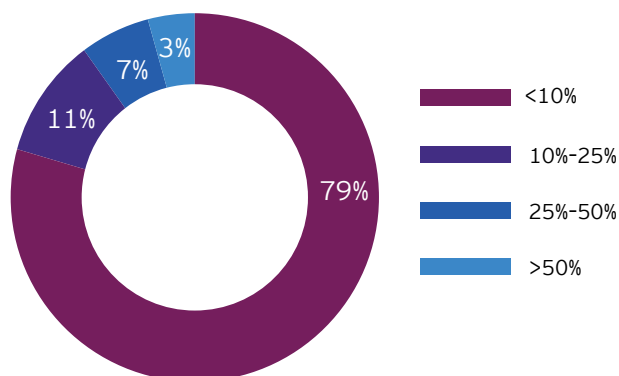| 92%	87%	70%	45%	35%
Value addition beyond cost arbitrage	Increased ownership of end-to-end global processes	Functional scope expansion	Leading global strategy and decision making	Building global leadership pipelines

Strategic opportunities ahead

India's GCC value proposition continues to strengthen, driven by deep and scalable talent supported by strong STEM pipelines and enterprise skilling. This enables policies such as Digital India and Skill India, accelerates AI-led transformation from pilots to enterprise scale, and expands global leadership roles–positioning India, and emerging hubs like Kolkata, as key centers for innovation, decision-making and long-term value creation.

Challenges to address

Despite strong momentum, the GCC ecosystem faces clear challenges. Talent shortages in niche digital skills, rising wage pressures and increasing operating costs require sharper workforce and cost strategies. Leadership localization remains limited, with a majority of global leadership roles still based outside India. Despite growing maturity, most GCCs still have limited leadership presence in India with nearly 80% reporting less than 10% of leadership roles based locally, underscoring the need to accelerate leadership localization for greater strategic influence.[1]

Leadership roles based in India (EY GCC Pulse Survey 2025)

- <10%
- 10%-25%
- 25%-50%
- >50%

Additionally, sustaining growth will require faster approvals, stronger IP protection, smarter urban infrastructure and deeper collaboration between industry and academia. Addressing these challenges will be critical to ensuring that India's GCCs continue to evolve from delivery engines to strategic leaders shaping global enterprise outcomes.

Inflection point

Intelligent GCCs and the rise of AI-led operating models

The next wave of GCC evolution is being shaped by the rise of Intelligent GCCs– AI-native, data-driven organizations designed to operate with significantly higher levels of autonomy, collaboration and enterprise impact. This shift represents a fundamental change in how global organizations design and scale their operating models. Rather than relying on linear, people-intensive growth, Intelligent GCCs embed AI at the core of their delivery architecture to drive faster decision-making, higher-value outcomes, and sustained competitive advantage.

Industry evidence points to a clear inflection point. GCCs are already investing in Agentic AI, with a further 29% planning adoption. More than 80% of GCCs are actively scaling Generative AI and enterprise automation, with deployments spanning customer service, finance, operations and cybersecurity.[1] This marks a decisive move away from experimentation toward execution, reinforcing the idea that GCCs are evolving from cost centers into enterprise intelligence hubs where AI, data and R&D reshape how global work is done.

Pillar 1:
AI-native foundations

At the core of Intelligent GCCs is the need for AI-native foundations. These GCCs are designed for intelligence at scale from the outset, supported by modern cloud architectures, integrated data platforms, API-led ecosystems, and low-code or no-code environments. Such foundations enable what many organizations now describe as "intelligence arbitrage" – the ability to combine India's deep talent pools with AI-enabled automation to deliver outcomes faster, with lower marginal costs, and across global geographies. Without this foundational reset, AI adoption risks remain fragmented and incremental rather than transformative.

Examples emerging from the ecosystem include the use of intelligent agents to execute entire order-to-cash or record-to-report cycles, replacing hundreds of fragmented task-level automations. Unlike traditional automation, these agents can interpret context, make decisions and dynamically reroute workflows, fundamentally changing how processes are executed rather than merely optimizing individual steps.

Pillar 2:
Workforce reskilling and augmentation

Talent transformation is central to the Intelligent GCC model. As AI and intelligent agents increasingly augment human work, GCCs are rethinking skills, roles and career paths. 71% of GCCs are actively reskilling their existing workforce, reflecting recognition that future value will come from human judgment, orchestration and decision stewardship rather than task execution alone. Intelligent GCCs are characterized by a shift toward hybrid teams where humans and AI systems collaborate, with humans focusing on oversight, exception handling, and enterprise-level problem solving.[1]

Pillar 3:
Reimagined value chains and operating models

Intelligent GCCs move beyond traditional task-based delivery toward outcome-oriented operating models. This shift requires reimagining functional value chains end to end, breaking down silos across finance, operations, supply chain and customer functions.

Illustrative use cases include autonomous customer analytics dashboards that proactively surface insights, AI-driven financial close processes that reduce cycle times, and predictive supply chain intelligence that anticipate disruptions before they occur. In more advanced scenarios, intelligent agents execute entire processes —from demand sensing to fulfillment— significantly reducing latency and improving enterprise responsiveness.

Together, these AI-driven workflows enable GCCs to deliver "outcomes-as-a-service" rather than discrete activities, shifting the focus from incremental process optimization to true process reinvention with materially higher enterprise impact.

Pillar 4:
Governance, trust, and responsible AI

As autonomy increases, governance becomes a defining capability of Intelligent GCCs. The growing use of Generative AI and Agentic AI introduces new risks related to bias, transparency, security and accountability.

The industry increasingly recognizes that Responsible AI must evolve beyond static controls. Continuous monitoring, standardized data and model policies, and clearly defined human-in-the-loop oversight mechanisms are becoming essential to maintaining trust as AI systems scale across enterprise operations. Responsible AI is no longer a compliance exercise; it is a prerequisite for scaling intelligence safely and sustainably across the enterprise.

The implication is clear: GCCs which embed AI and data at the core of their operating model will lead the next wave of competitive advantage, while those treating AI as isolated initiatives risk being left behind.

CHAPTER 3

Value
creation

AI, data and governance reshaping enterprise outcomes

India's GCCs are at the forefront of an AI-led transformation that is redefining enterprise operating models. AI, Generative AI and agentic AI now sit at the core of how organizations innovate, scale and compete. 58% of GCCs are investing in agentic AI and 83% are scaling Generative AI initiatives, signalling a structural shift toward intelligence-led value creation.[1]

Technology investment allocation (EY GCC Pulse Survey 2025)

	Currently investing	Plan to invest in one year
GenAI	**83%**	**2%**
Cybersecurity enhancements	**83%**	**5%**
Agentic AI	**58%**	**29%**
Digital Twins	**55%**	**10%**
Process mining tools	**53%**	**16%**
Decision intelligence tools	**34%**	**9%**
AR / VR	**21%**	**3%**

76% of Indian business leaders believe GenAI will have a significant business impact. While 23% of our respondents are in early stage/pilots, 47% now have multiple use cases live in production. 91% reported that speed of deployment was the single biggest factor driving their buying decisions, reflecting the increasing impatience to get solutions into production[34]

From 'cost arbitrage' to 'innovation arbitrage'

Two-thirds of GCCs are establishing dedicated innovation teams and incubation programs to develop, test and globalize ideas from India. As one large global retailer's GCC leader put it, "labour arbitrage has disappeared - it's now about the right talent, at the right price, at the right time."
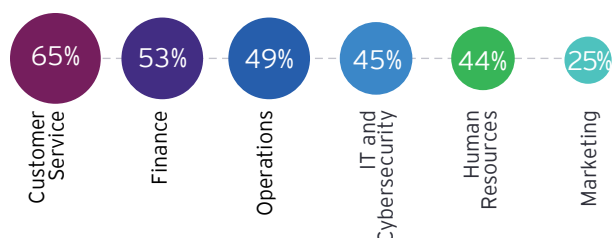
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3. *Aldea of India: Outlook 2026*
4. *The Aldea of India: 2025 – How much productivity can GenAI unlock in India?*

Digitally mature GCCs are increasingly positioned as global, capability-driven organizations rather than India-centric delivery centres. Many now own end-to-end processes, spearhead digital programs, and manage platforms that support enterprise outcomes worldwide.

Areas of GenAI application (EY GCC Pulse Survey 2025)

65%	53%	49%	45%	44%	25%
Customer Service	Finance	Operations	IT and Cybersecurity	Human Resources	Marketing

AI adoption across value chains

AI adoption has moved well beyond isolated automation. GCCs are now orchestrating transformation across entire value chains.

- **Retail:** A large global retailer's GCC shifted from a shared-services model to a global solutions hub managing supplier lifecycle processes, customer engagement, promotions and core finance with AI-enabled workflows embedded throughout. Another global retail chain's solutions centre embeds AI across a complex, high-volume model spanning corporate and franchise stores, fuel operations and proprietary store technology. Integrated digital, data, finance and product teams operate as one, using AI-enabled platforms to power delivery, loyalty and payments, driving measurable business value.[5]

- **Life sciences:** One global biopharmaceutical GCC has embedded digital transformation across the entire pharmaceutical value chain from discovery and development to manufacturing, regulatory submissions and patient engagement. Its GCC leader explained, "we are rethinking literally every aspect of the value chain in terms of the capabilities and possibilities of leveraging AI and other digital technologies," highlighting how AI is directly shaping speed-to-market and patient outcomes rather than supporting functions alone.

These examples illustrate AI as a driver of capability, not just efficiency

Data, analytics and decision intelligence

With AI scaling, GCCs increasingly operate as enterprise data centres of excellence, maintaining a "single source of truth" through standardized data models, metadata catalogues and automated pipelines that fuel AI initiatives with trusted data.

- In retail, one global retailer highlighted the use of a data-driven "should-cost" model developed within its GCC, enabling buyers to make more informed sourcing decisions and "negotiate better deals for customers." This demonstrates how GCC-led analytics directly shape pricing, procurement and value realization.

- In life sciences sector, at one GCC, AI-enabled automation reduced the quality review time for large regulatory documents "from 40 hours to about 40 minutes," significantly accelerating throughput.

- In biopharmaceutical, advanced GenAI and semantic search platforms are improving access to medical knowledge, especially in rare diseases, supporting faster insights for patients and clinicians.

Risk, governance and responsible AI

As AI adoption within GCCs matures from experimentation to enterprise-scale deployment, risk and governance become central to sustaining trust and value. Organizations are increasingly aligning GenAI initiatives with global standards such as the NIST AI Risk Management Framework, the EU AI Act and ISO 42001 to ensure transparency, accountability and regulatory compliance. However, the rise of agentic AI introduces additional complexity, as autonomous systems can take decisions and actions with limited human intervention. This necessitates distinct, multi-layered risk frameworks covering model design, access controls, auditability, runtime monitoring and escalation mechanisms.

Leading GCCs are responding by embedding responsible AI practices directly into their operating models. Ethics councils, human-in-the-loop approval workflows, controlled testing sandboxes and continuous performance monitoring are becoming standard, particularly in regulated sectors such as life sciences and financial services. For example, pharmaceutical GCCs are implementing human oversight and detailed audit trails for AI-driven clinical analytics, while financial services GCCs use monitored GenAI agents for customer and credit processes to balance automation with accountability.

EY's perspective is clear that responsible AI is not a constraint on innovation, but a strategic enabler. GCCs that proactively integrate governance, ethics and risk management into AI adoption will be better positioned to scale intelligent solutions safely, meet evolving regulatory expectations and strengthen their role as trusted enterprise transformation partners.

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5. *EY Case Studies*

The future of work

Roles and leadership are being redesigned

The future of work within GCCs is undergoing a structural shift as enterprises move toward high-value, innovation-led and AI-enabled operating models. What began as a focus on productivity improvement has evolved into a deeper rethink of how work is designed, governed and scaled across global organizations. As automation, GenAI and Agentic AI mature, GCCs are increasingly becoming the platforms through which these technologies are implemented, institutionalized and scaled across the enterprise.

Human-AI augmentation as the productivity engine

Evidence suggests that AI is changing work primarily through augmentation rather than replacement. Our study, "How much productivity can GenAI unlock in India? The AIdea of India: 2025" (insights from more than 125 C-suite respondents), indicates that AI could influence almost 38 million jobs by 2030 and lift national productivity by 2.61% in the organized sector, with a further 2.82% possible as GenAI adoption expands into the unorganized economy. The analysis also shows that around a quarter of tasks can be fully automated and a further 42% can be augmented by AI, potentially freeing 8 to 10 hours per week for knowledge workers.

However, the same research highlights a structural constraint: only 3% of Indian organizations believe they have sufficient in-house AI capability, while the remaining 97% cite talent shortages as a key barrier. The message is clear: the productivity promise of AI depends as much on building human capability as on deploying technology.

Demonstrating value in an environment of rising costs

As GCCs expand their role in transformation initiatives, leaders are under increasing pressure to demonstrate measurable value. Cost structures are shifting, and scrutiny has intensified. Research shows that overall cost per FTE has risen from Rs. 23.3 lakh in 2022 to Rs. 27.5 lakh, an 8.5% CAGR. Manpower costs have grown as well, increasing from Rs. 20.5 lakh to Rs. 23.6 lakh over the same period, reflecting a 7.5% CAGR.[6]

Key cost and operations indicators (COBS 2025)

Overall cost per FTE	
27.5 Lakhs p.a. 2022: 23.3 LPA	8.5% CAGR

Manpower cost per FTE	
23.6 LPA 2022: 20.5 LPA	7.5% CAGR

Facility cost per FTE

1.8 LPA
2022: 1.3 LPA
▲ **16.8% CAGR**

IT & comms cost per FTE

1.4 LPA
2022: 1.3 LPA
▲ **3.1% CAGR**

Travel cost per FTE

0.6 LPA
2022: 0.2 LPA
▲ **71% CAGR**

Higher rentals, the return of business travel and increased office attendance have contributed to the rise in overall costs, while wage growth is being driven by intense competition for niche digital and AI skills. In response, many GCCs are recalibrating their talent pyramids, shifting a portion of hiring toward junior and mid-level roles while simultaneously investing in structured capability building. This approach allows them to contain costs while maintaining momentum on innovation and digital initiatives.
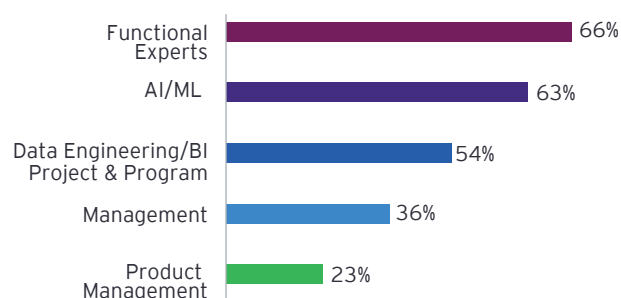
Why some GCCs convert AI into outcomes and others do not

Despite widespread experimentation, AI adoption is not producing uniform results. A study that surveyed 15,000 employees and 1,500 employers across 29 countries shows nearly 9 out of 10 employees now use AI at work, yet only 28% of organizations are positioned to turn AI deployment into high-value outcomes. Where AI is layered on top of weak learning cultures, misaligned reward systems or outdated operating structures, productivity benefits lag by over 40%. Conversely, organizations that integrate talent strategy, leadership behaviors, learning architecture and technology deployment in a coordinated way are more likely to achieve measurable impact. In practice, this means treating AI adoption as an organizational redesign exercise, not simply a technology rollout.[7]

Roles evolve from execution to orchestration

As AI becomes embedded in day-to-day workflows, the nature of roles within GCCs is changing. New hybrid positions such as Agent Workflow Designers, AgentOps Managers, GenAI and LLMOps Engineers, AI Product Owners, Data Quality and Retrieval Specialists, Responsible AI Architects, Prompt Librarians and LLM Site Reliability Engineers (SREs) are emerging at the intersection of business, governance and technology. These roles focus less on executing tasks and more on designing, supervising and optimizing human-AI collaboration. This shift underscores a broader transition from task-based work to orchestration-based work.
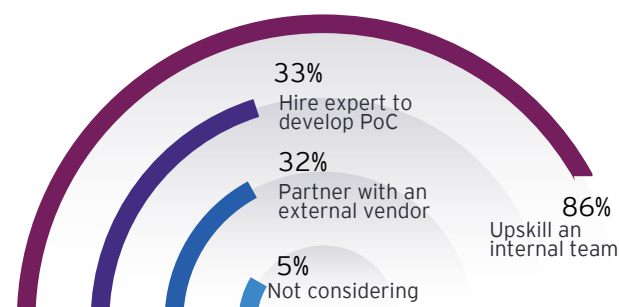
Critical skills shaping the future GCC workforce (EY GCC Pulse Survey 2025)

Functional Experts	66%
AI/ML	63%
Data Engineering/BI Project & Program	54%
Management	36%
Product Management	23%

Scaling through continuous learning

GCC growth is increasingly shaped by learning rather than headcount. Re-skilling and capability development have become central to how organizations scale. Learning pathways are moving beyond general AI awareness toward role-specific specialization and agentic enablement, with many AI-centric roles expected to become mainstream within the next two years. This emphasis on capability is also expanding leadership opportunities. It is anticipated that global leadership roles in Indian GCCs could rise from around 6,500 today to more than 30,000 by 2030, supported by strong internal development programs designed to build globally ready leaders.[2]

How GCCs are building AI-ready workforces through upskilling (EY GCC Pulse Survey 2025)

33%
Hire expert to develop PoC

32%
Partner with an external vendor

5%
Not considering

86%
Upskill an internal team

Way forward

Taken together, these shifts suggest that the future of work in GCCs will be shaped by human-AI augmentation, clearer ownership of outcomes and a culture of continuous learning. Organizations that combine disciplined cost management with targeted capability building and thoughtful deployment of AI are likely to deliver sustained enterprise value. More importantly, they will play a defining role in shaping how global work is organized, governed and experienced in the years ahead.

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6. *GCC Cost and Operations Benchmarking Study (COBS) 2024-25.*
7. *EY Work Reimagined 2025 Study.*

CHAPTER 5

The ecosystem

Why India remains structurally advantaged

India's GCC ecosystem is being strengthened by the convergence of multiple stakeholders working in tandem – government bodies, start-ups, academic institutions and commercial real estate players. Together, they are creating an environment that supports not just the establishment of GCCs, but their sustained evolution into high-value, innovation-led global hubs. Policy incentives reduce friction at entry, start-ups inject speed and specialization, academia ensures continuity of talent, and real estate developers provide the physical infrastructure required for scale, collaboration and future-ready work. This ecosystem-led approach is a key reason India continues to outpace other global locations in both GCC volume and maturity.

Policy frameworks

India's rise as the world's leading GCC destination is underpinned by increasingly mature and targeted policy frameworks at both central and state levels. Recognizing GCCs as long-term value creators, several state governments have introduced dedicated GCC or IT/ITES policies that focus on sustained investment, employment generation and capability depth. States such as Karnataka, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Telangana and Haryana (draft stage) now offer a calibrated mix of capital-linked incentives, operational expenditure support, employment-linked subsidies and energy cost relief.

These incentives typically cover setup costs, lease rentals, power tariffs, stamp duty exemptions and wage reimbursements, reducing both entry barriers and early-stage operating risk for global enterprises. Importantly, most policies are designed with multi-year validity, encouraging GCCs to scale over time rather than pursue short-term footprint optimization. In parallel, national initiatives aligned with Digital India and data centers' expansion are strengthening the foundational infrastructure required for AI-led, data-intensive GCC operations. For emerging locations, this convergence of fiscal incentives, infrastructure readiness and faster approvals materially improves time-to-scale and long-term viability.

Start-up ecosystem

India's start-up ecosystem has emerged as a powerful force multiplier for GCC-led innovation. With a start-up landscape valued at over US$100 billion and spanning deep-tech, AI, fintech, healthcare, retail, and cybersecurity, start-ups are increasingly integrated into GCC agendas. Rather than operating as closed captive units, GCCs are evolving into open innovation platforms that actively collaborate with start-ups through accelerators, co-creation models, Centres of Excellence (CoE), and structured partnership frameworks.

These collaborations allow GCCs to combine start-up speed and specialization with enterprise-scale governance and global market access. Across sectors, GCC–start-up partnerships are enabling rapid experimentation and commercialization of emerging technologies. In healthcare, collaborations around Generative AI are transforming clinical documentation, medical summarization, and patient engagement. In retail, AI-driven recommendation engines and conversational bots developed by start-ups are being industrialized by GCCs to support global customer experience programs. Similarly, financial services GCCs are partnering with fintech start-ups to advance digital lending, fraud detection and financial inclusion initiatives. This symbiotic relationship positions GCCs not only as consumers of innovation, but as active enablers of India's start-up growth story.

Commercial real estate

Commercial real estate is a critical enabler in India's GCC growth story. Industry estimates indicate that GCCs currently occupy nearly a quarter of Grade A office stock across India's top markets, making them one of the most influential occupier segments. GCCs consistently account for a significant share of annual office leasing activity, driven by large floor plate requirements, long-term lease tenures, and a preference for high-quality, future-ready workspaces.

As GCC portfolios mature, occupiers are increasingly adopting a core-and-flex strategy, combining long-term leased offices with flexible or managed workspaces to balance scalability, cost efficiency and risk management. This trend is particularly pronounced among small and mid-sized GCCs, where flexibility, faster market entry and reduced upfront capital commitments are critical. For larger GCCs, flex space is being selectively deployed to support project-based teams, incubation units, and rapid expansion needs, allowing leadership teams to focus on core business outcomes rather than real estate management.

Beyond traditional Tier-1 hubs, GCC-driven demand is gradually extending into Tier-2 cities through hub-and-spoke models, supported by competitive rentals, improving infrastructure and evolving talent ecosystems. GCC occupiers are increasingly prioritizing next-generation office environments which integrate sustainability, technology enablement, flexibility and employee experience. The growing preference for LEED-certified buildings (nearly 40% of pan-India GCC-occupied office stock is LEED certified[8]), energy-efficient design, and hybrid-friendly layouts reflects how real estate is no longer a cost consideration alone, but a strategic lever supporting talent attraction, productivity and long-term resilience.

Why academic partnerships matter

Academic institutions play a pivotal role in strengthening India's GCC ecosystem by bridging advanced research, talent development and enterprise innovation. GCCs are increasingly collaborating with leading universities on applied research programs spanning six months to three years, co-developing solutions while building future-ready talent pipelines through guest lectures, internships and joint academic initiatives.

Partnerships such as a prominent automotive GCC working with IIT Madras on product and process innovation, and a multinational pharmaceutical GCC collaborating with IIIT Bengaluru to improve patient care, illustrate this model in action. In parallel, GCC engagement with on-campus incubators enables access to entrepreneurial talent and deep-tech capabilities, as seen in a leading aerospace company's Engineering and Technology Centre partnering with IIT incubators to convert early-stage ideas into enterprise-ready solutions. Collectively, academia has emerged as a foundational pillar supporting sustained innovation and long-term capability building within GCCs.

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8.   *Cushman & Wakefield*

Geography unlocked

Kolkata's role in a rebalanced GCC footprint

Eastern India's emergence as a GCC destination is already being validated by a growing base of multinational GCCs operating out of Kolkata including HSBC, Ericsson and BT Group. An assessment of existing GCC presence (20+ GCCs) in the region reveals a clear set of structural advantages, sectoral patterns and operating-model commonalities that position Eastern India as a credible next wave growth corridor for global enterprises.

A diversified multinational footprint with strong North American and European presence

A review of GCCs operating in Kolkata indicates a strong concentration of North American and European headquartered enterprises. Over half of the observed GCCs originate from the United States, and Western and Northen Europe, alongside representation from the UK, Japan and the UAE. This geographic diversity demonstrates Kolkata's ability to support globally distributed operating models across time zones and regulatory environments.

Importantly, these are not predominantly first-time offshoring entrants. Most organizations operating in the region already maintain mature GCCs elsewhere in India and have expanded into Eastern India as part of a portfolio-based location diversification strategy. This suggests that Kolkata is increasingly viewed not as an experimental or secondary location, but as a complementary delivery hub that balances cost, talent availability and operational resilience.

Sector concentration reflects a shift beyond traditional IT services

While technology-enabled services remain central, the sectoral mix of GCCs in Eastern India is increasingly diversified. Telecommunications and telecom software organizations form a significant cluster, leveraging the region for network operations and OSS/BSS platforms. Alongside this, a presence of specialty chemicals, healthcare and life sciences, financial services, electronics, and e-commerce and automotive firms, indicates that the region is moving beyond a pure IT/ITeS profile toward multi-industry, capability-led GCCs.

Common focus areas signal a move toward intelligence-led operations

Across sectors, clear commonalities emerge in the work delivered by Kolkata-based GCCs. The most prevalent focus areas include advanced analytics, AI and machine learning, network and operations automation, product engineering support, quality assurance and enterprise IT services. Several centers also support R&D-related activities. This pattern indicates that Kolkata GCCs are not confined to transactional services; instead, they are increasingly involved in end-to-end global workflows, supporting decision-making, product lifecycle management and intelligent operations. The prominence of analytics, AI-driven intelligence and automation support further reinforces Eastern India's alignment with the next-generation Intelligent GCC model.

Lean-to-scalable centers with room for long-term expansion

Current GCCs in Kolkata span a wide range of scale—from lean specialist teams to centers employing several hundred professionals. While many centers today operate with relatively modest headcount, their functional scope indicate scalability. This is consistent with patterns observed in emerging GCC locations, where organizations prioritize capability and leadership stability before aggressive scale-up.

Eastern India's comparatively lower operating costs further enhance its attractiveness for such long-horizon investments, particularly for organizations seeking sustainable workforce models in analytics, engineering and AI-enabled roles.

What Kolkata and Eastern India must now enable

To sustain momentum and attract the next wave of GCC investments, Eastern India will need to progressively strengthen its capability narrative. This requires sharper positioning around strengths such as analytics and data engineering, AI-enabled operations, and industry-specific Centres of Excellence across BFSI, telecom and healthcare.

The region would also benefit from a more predictable "GCC landing playbook," including single-window facilitation, standardized setup timelines, clearer talent availability maps and plug-and-play GCC parks. Equally important is stronger talent signaling. Despite the presence of institutions such as IIT Kharagpur, IIM Calcutta, ISI and JU, the pathway from universities to GCC careers remains under-articulated. Targeted industry–academia programs in data, AI, product engineering and risk, supported by internships and "GCC-ready" certifications, can help convert latent talent into immediately deployable capability.

Building greater ecosystem visibility will also be critical. Attracting a few large anchor GCCs and amplifying demonstrable success stories can catalyze confidence and scale. With targeted policy support, premium office ecosystems, coordinated industry collaboration, stronger employer branding and sustained signaling to global leadership, Kolkata can accelerate its evolution from an emerging GCC alternative to a preferred hub for capability-led growth.

Outlook

Leadership choices will shape the next decade

The GCC landscape in India is entering a phase defined less by expansion alone and more by how intelligently centers operate. Intelligent GCCs – AI-enabled, data-driven and governed with discipline – will increasingly set the benchmark for value creation.

Three themes stand out for the road ahead. First, AI will continue to move deeper into workflows, shifting GCC emphasis toward orchestration, oversight and productized capabilities. Learning, governance and role redesign must therefore progress in parallel with technology rollout. Organizations that treat AI as a structural redesign rather than a set of tools will lead.

Second, cost pressures and value expectations will remain intertwined. Rising operating expenditure will require sharper metrics that connect GCC performance directly to enterprise outcomes. This alignment will accelerate the evolution of GCCs from delivery partners to strategic decision-making engines.

Third, geography will become a strategic lever. Distributed footprints supported by credible locations such as Kolkata will enable resilience, diversified talent access and scalable AI-first models.

The next decade will not be defined simply by where GCCs operate, but by how intelligently they are designed and governed.

For enterprises, the implication is clear: GCCs have moved from being centers of execution to architects of enterprise capability. And for cities like Kolkata, the opportunity is both significant and long-term – to help build the next generation of globally relevant, innovation-driven GCCs that shape how work is imagined and delivered worldwide.

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About
ASSOCHAM

ASSOCHAM initiated its endeavor of value creation for Indian industry in 1920. It brings in actionable insights to strengthen the Indian ecosystem, leveraging its network of more than 4,50,000 members, of which MSMEs represent a large segment. With a strong presence in states, and key cities globally, ASSOCHAM also has more than 400 associations, federations and regional chambers in its fold.

Aligned with the vision of creating a New India, ASSOCHAM works as a conduit between the industry and the Government. The Chamber is an agile and forward-looking institution, leading various initiatives to enhance the global competitiveness of the Indian industry, while strengthening the domestic ecosystem. With more than 100 national and regional sector councils, ASSOCHAM is an impactful representative of the Indian industry. These Councils are led by well-known industry leaders, academicians, economists and independent professionals. The Chamber focuses on aligning critical needs and interests of the industry with the growth aspirations of the nation.

ASSOCHAM is working hand in hand with the government, regulators and national and international think tanks to contribute to the policy making process and share vital feedback on implementation of decisions of far-reaching consequences. In line with its focus on being future-ready, the Chamber is building a strong network of knowledge architects. Thus, ASSOCHAM is all set to redefine the dynamics of growth and development in the technology-driven 'Knowledge-Based Economy. The Chamber aims to empower stakeholders in the Indian economy by inculcating knowledge that will be the catalyst of growth in the dynamic global environment.

Vision

Be the knowledge architect for the Indian economy, with a focus on strengthening India's domestic ecosystem and enhancing global competitiveness.

Mission

Its mission is to impact the policy and legislative environment so as to foster balanced economic, industrial and social development.

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