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# Migration Skill Corridor Report INDIA - NETHERLANDS

Julia Reinold  
Varsha Joshi  
Godfried Engbersen  
S. Irudaya Rajan

<http://link4skills.eu>



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# The Mouse and the Elephant

## The Migration Skill Corridor between India and the Netherlands

Julia Reinold, Varsha Joshi, Godfried Engbersen and S. Irudaya Rajan

### Abstract

This working paper analyses the India-Netherlands migration skill corridor and the legal, political and institutional conditions that shape it. Drawing on stakeholder and expert interviews conducted within the Link4skills project, combining perspectives of both origin and destination countries, and complemented by desk research, the paper classifies the corridor predominantly as the highly skilled migration type as it emerged following the introduction of the Dutch highly skilled migration scheme (*kennismigrantenregeling*) in 2004. The paper categorises the corridor as established, albeit relatively recent, given that India is the Netherlands' most important origin country for highly skilled migrants. As Dutch high-skilled migration policy is demand-driven, the corridor is largely private-sector led and continues to develop in an ad hoc manner rather than through dedicated bilateral mobility agreements. The paper maps key migration channels within the corridor and situates them within broader governance frameworks, including social security coordination and double taxation arrangements. It highlights recent shifts, including a marked decline in knowledge migration in 2023–2024 alongside growing family migration. Implementation bottlenecks are identified for employers (especially SMEs), notably around recognised sponsorship requirements and administrative capacity. While recruitment and integration in STEM/IT is comparatively smooth, medium-skilled migrants, especially in the healthcare sector, face challenges regarding language requirements and the recognition of qualifications. Policy implications point to a more proactive skills strategy, stronger public–private coordination, clearer pathways for medium-skilled talent, and enhanced integration and retention measures, including support for accompanying partners and housing.

## Introduction

This working paper analyses the India-Netherlands migration skill corridor and the legal, political and institutional conditions that shape it. Migration skill corridors are pathways for skilled migration between an origin and a destination country offering strategic support to mitigate mismatches between labour demand and supply through the exchange of skills, talent, and knowledge.<sup>1 2 3</sup> As an analytical construct,<sup>4</sup> they help explain how skilled migration emerges and evolves by linking macro-level policies and labour-market dynamics with meso-level institutional arrangements and micro-level individual decisions. They can take different forms, including post-colonial, post-guest worker, highly skilled, medium-skilled/sector-based, and humanitarian corridor types and vary with regard to formality, establishment, and governance.<sup>5</sup>

The India-Netherlands migration skill corridor is one of 14 migration skill corridors investigated under the Link4Skills project.<sup>6</sup> The corridor is particularly interesting because of the differences in size of the two countries, and because Indians form the largest group of non-EU labour migrants in the Netherlands, in particular when it comes to highly skilled migration.<sup>7</sup>

This paper is based on 24 semi-structured interviews conducted with stakeholders and experts in India and the Netherlands in 2025. Combining perspectives from both countries helps to go beyond the destination country bias in migration research. Interviews were conducted with three policy makers, 12 practitioners and nine experts working in the field of skilled migration (marked as \_pol, \_prac, or \_exp respectively in the references). Most of the interviews covered skilled migration from India or to the Netherlands more generally, while three were specific to the Indian-Dutch corridor.<sup>8</sup> A complete overview of all interviews is available in the Appendix. All interviews were transcribed, coded and analysed using an issue-focused analysis. To substantiate the main arguments, interviews were complemented by desk research, covering statistics, research literature and policy documents.

Considering that migration from India to the Netherlands increased significantly following the introduction of the Dutch highly skilled migration scheme (*kennismigrantenregeling*) in 2004, we classify the corridor as the highly skilled migration type. Despite having developed relatively recently, the corridor is rather established. As Dutch high-skilled migration policy is demand-driven, the corridor is largely private-sector led and continues to develop in an ad hoc manner depending on private sector needs rather than through public steering that would allow for addressing more long-term labour market needs.

The paper first describes legal, political, and institutional frameworks and relations that are relevant for understanding the Indian-Dutch migration skill corridor. After that, it summarises key trends and

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<sup>1</sup> Engbersen, G. & Reinold, J. (forthcoming). Chapter 1. Migration Skill Corridors. In I. Grabowska and M. B. Setrana (Eds.), *Fair Skilled Mobility. A Manifesto*. Routledge, Abingdon/New York.

<sup>2</sup> Snel, E., Engbersen, G., & Reinold, J. (2024). *The complexity of migration decisions within migration corridors: Applying insights from EUMAGINE and THEMIS studies to the Link4Skills project*. Link4Skills Working Paper 3/2024. Available at: <https://link4skills.eu/index.php/2025/01/31/l4s-migration-decisions-report/>

<sup>3</sup> Triandafyllidou, A., Shirazi, H., & Engbersen, G. (2024). *Concept paper on migration skill corridors*. Link4Skills Working Paper 2/2024. Available at: <https://link4skills.eu/index.php/2025/01/22/migration-skill-corridors/>

<sup>4</sup> Carling, J., & Jolivet, D. (2016). Exploring 12 migration corridors: Rationale, methodology and overview. In O. Bakewell, G. Engbersen, M. L. Fonseca, & C. Horst (Eds.), *Beyond networks: Feedback in international migration* (pp. 18–46). Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137539212>

<sup>5</sup> Engbersen, G. & Reinold, J. (forthcoming). Chapter 1. Migration Skill Corridors. In I. Grabowska and M. B. Setrana (Eds.), *Fair Skilled Mobility. A Manifesto*. Routledge, Abingdon/New York.

<sup>6</sup> <https://link4skills.eu>

<sup>7</sup> Engbersen, G. & Reinold, J. (2024). *Country Profile the Netherlands. Migration and Skill Corridors*. Available at: [https://link4skills.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/L4S\\_countryreport\\_NL\\_tm.pdf](https://link4skills.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/L4S_countryreport_NL_tm.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> One interesting experience that we made in India and the Netherlands is that it was not possible to recruit Embassies or Consulates for interviews because of the lack of official state-led migration policies or partnerships. As a consequence, migration was outside of the mandate of officials and they did not feel qualified, responsible or “urged” to talk to us about it despite the rather established nature of the Indian-Dutch migration skill corridor.

drivers of migration from India to the Netherlands. It then zooms into the recruitment, integration and retention of Indian migrants in the Netherlands, focusing especially on labour market aspects. Finally, it provides policy recommendations and concludes.

## Legal, political and institutional frameworks and relations

This section summarises the main approach towards skilled migration between India and the Netherlands. It provides an overview of the development of public and private initiatives relevant for understanding skilled migration within the Indian-Dutch corridor.

Despite their differences in size, the Netherlands and India are perceived as having a good relationship (L4S\_NL\_prac\_04; L4S\_NL-IND\_prac\_10).<sup>9</sup> There are no state-led agreements or partnerships that directly concern skilled or general migration in place yet<sup>10</sup>. However, “the time of laissez-faire [seems to be] over” (L4S\_NL\_pol\_15) and related agreements are being discussed<sup>11</sup>:

“We were in a pressure cooker around Prime Minister Modi’s planned visit to the Netherlands. That accelerated discussions on agreements, including migration. We try to balance interests: return cooperation, exchange, and expanding regular channels. This case will take more time than expected, but the potential is huge” (L4S\_NL\_pol\_15).

Thus far, Indian migration to the Netherlands has largely been a consequence of company locations, influenced by national, provincial, regional and municipal policies to attract businesses to the Netherlands (L4S\_NL\_prac\_02; L4S\_NL\_prac\_04; L4S\_NL\_prac\_18). “And when you set up the companies, all the expats come, of course” (L4S\_NL-IND\_prac\_10). Recently, this approach is becoming more selective in terms of what companies should be actively attracted and supported. Examples being mentioned are companies that contribute to regional challenges like sustainability or STEM (L4S\_NL\_prac\_IND; L4S\_NL-IND\_prac\_10; L4S\_NL\_prac\_18). This seems to be in line with discussions on what kind of society and economy the Netherlands wants to be (L4S\_NL\_pol\_08; L4S\_NL\_prac\_09; L4S\_NL\_prac\_13; L4S\_NL\_exp\_20; L4S\_NL\_exp\_21), and which kind of sectors and (migrant) workers they should invest in accordingly.<sup>1213</sup>

The Netherlands is an attractive location for companies due to its signed treaties to avoid double taxation with more than 100 countries (L4S\_NL-IND\_prac\_10), including the *Convention between the Republic of India and the Kingdom of the Netherlands for the Avoidance of Double Taxation and the Prevention of Fiscal Evasion of Taxes on Income and Capital*.<sup>14</sup> Different public actors (e.g., the Ministry of Economic Affairs, the Netherlands Foreign Investment Agency (NFIA), the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO), municipalities, etc.) are involved in attracting Indian companies to the Netherlands and in supporting them setting up their business in the country (L4S\_NL\_prac\_02; L4S\_NL-IND\_prac\_10; L4S\_NL\_prac\_18). Sometimes this is facilitated through economic visits/ missions to India (L4S\_NL\_prac\_03).

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9 In general, cooperation between India and the Netherlands focuses on water, agriculture, and health. Recent geopolitical trends have also led the two countries to focus more on marine and safety (L4S\_NL-IND\_prac\_10; L4S\_NL-IND\_exp\_23).

10 See also the recently published IBO Arbeidsmigratie <https://open.overheid.nl/documenten/25c8f9ef-c50d-478d-8a7e-2e42c327f3f2/file#page6>

11 See also: <https://www.thehansindia.com/news/national/vast-potential-of-cooperation-between-india-netherlands-mea-958977>

12 This idea is also communicated in the Deltaplan, see <https://heterlijkeverhaal.nu/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Deltaplan-Grip-op-Arbeidsmigratie.pdf>

13 Another interesting point that was mentioned and which does not directly concern migration, is that Indian companies also shape employment in the Netherlands: A company from Delhi that produces tractors for Latin America is going to sign an agreement with a car company in Limburg, VDL in Born. They will produce the different components in India, ship them to the Netherlands and then putting the electric car together in Born, where they did the Mini Cooper, but the Mini Cooper stopped. So, I think this is a brilliant example of how an innovative Indian company can produce a micro car and can shape employment in the Netherlands” (L4S\_NL-IND\_prac\_10).

14 <https://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBV0006088/2012-11-02/>

In addition, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (*Rijksdienst voor Ondernemend Nederland*, RVO) support international entrepreneurs to start or expand their business to the Netherlands through the “Netherlands Point of Entry”.<sup>15</sup> From an entrepreneurship perspective, India is interesting because “at all levels of government, India is investing a lot in innovation and becoming a thriving entrepreneurship ecosystem” (L4S\_NL\_exp\_11). Important here are the start-up and self-employed visa. Furthermore, there is a residence permit for essential startup personnel.<sup>16</sup> Start-up exchanges and development of talent on both sides of the corridor are also the aim of the Indian-Dutch Start-up Link (L4S\_NL\_prac\_04) and Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) on the Innovation Corridor between the Dutch City of The Hague and the Indian State of Karnataka.<sup>17</sup> Such MoUs build on the long-standing presence of major Indian technology companies in the Netherlands, many of which successfully expanded into Europe around ten to 15 years ago. Although these early expansions were not formalised through bilateral MoUs, they have since evolved into reference models for Indian startups seeking European market access and an international business footprint. This demand is increasingly facilitated by the The Hague Business Agency (THBA), which has proactively institutionalised such linkages through structured agreements, including an MoU with the Government of Karnataka to tap into Bengaluru’s startup ecosystem. Through tailored business programmes, the THBA offers Indian startups and firms curated entry points into the Dutch market, including fact-finding trips and targeted engagements with local government and key stakeholders in the IT and technology ecosystem. The Netherlands remains particularly attractive due to its strategic location within Europe, proximity to clients, multilingual and highly skilled workforce, strong knowledge infrastructure, and overall ease of doing business. The existing concentration of leading Indian IT firms in the country further reinforces its appeal as a preferred entry hub. While it does not directly concern migration, it indirectly effects the Indian migration to the Netherlands (L4S\_NL\_prac\_02).

At the same time, the Indian government encourages companies to move abroad through its industry politics:

“The reason there are so many Indian IT people [in the Netherlands] has nothing to do with us. It has to do with the Indian government. [...] India sort of set up a few really big Indian conglomerates and made sure that they moved abroad. They start doing assignments for Western companies to bring jobs actually to India. So, if you look at the companies here [...] they do the work for the Dutch banks, for example. And this is all Indian industry politics. So, it's on assignment. It's that basically their development model. [...] And through the Indian companies come a lot of Indians looking for an actual job. So ASML has a lot of Indians coming in because people now look at the Netherlands. But the first mover has been for the Indian companies themselves.” (see L4S\_NL\_prac\_02).

In the context of state-led initiatives that are essential for labour migration, the “Agreement on Social Security between the Kingdom of the Netherlands and the Republic of India”<sup>18</sup> regulates the portability of social security benefits between the countries, prevents double and non-coverage (L4S\_NL\_exp\_06).

The introduction of the knowledge migrant scheme (*Kennismigrantenregeling*) in 2004 was a key moment for strengthening the Indian-Dutch migration skill corridor:

“Prior to [the introduction of the knowledge migrant visa scheme] a lot of the labour migration was limited to workers who sporadically came in, not so much as a program, and it was quite cumbersome to get visas there. No work permits. The *kennismigrant* visas changed that dynamic. It introduced a special program that also benefited the spouse

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.netherlandspointofentry.nl/start-a-business/>

<sup>16</sup> Information for entrepreneurs is available here: <https://business.gov.nl/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://citytoday.media/2019/11/18/hague-and-karnataka-renew-mou-on-innovation-corridor-at-bengaluru-tech-summit/>

<sup>18</sup> <https://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBV0003812/2018-03-01>

because earlier getting the spouse on the same time as the primary migrant arrived was very difficult. And the work permit also for the spouse was also arranged as part of that skilled migrant visa. That changed the whole dynamic of which groups could be attracted. So that was not just IT workers. Then you had a whole range of people who came in to work within engineering industries, for example, which were not originally IT focused or also universities. And other research organizations started to attract people” (L4S\_NL-IND\_exp\_23).

Today, most Indians move to the Netherlands as knowledge migrants (*kennismigranten*) and as intra-company transferees (see L4S\_NL\_prac\_02; L4S\_NL\_exp\_06). The orientation year visa for international graduates can also help attract and retain international talent (L4S\_NL-IND\_prac\_10).<sup>19</sup> There is no specific scheme for medium-skilled migration, that could for example facilitate the migration of nurses and technicians.

In the context of highly skilled migration to the Netherlands, it is furthermore important to mention the so-called 30%-ruling, which allows highly skilled migrants to apply for a reduction of their income tax as a compensation for costs of moving and differences in living costs. This is supposed to increase the attractiveness of the Netherlands for highly skilled migrants and actually seems to work.<sup>20</sup> In practice this means that for a certain period of time, up to 30 per cent of the annual income of eligible highly skilled migrant is tax-free, leading to an increased net income.<sup>21</sup> The 30% ruling has been modified several times in recent years and remains subject of political debate (L4S\_NL\_prac\_01). “The 30% ruling, like I said, has been diminished to 27%. And it used to be ten years. Now it's five. So, expats feel that they are less welcome” (L4S\_NL-IND\_prac\_10). In addition, these changes may not only deter migrants already in the country, but also those who are currently in the decision-making process to move to the Netherlands (L4S\_NL\_prac\_04). In one interview, it was criticised that many Indian migrants who are eligible for this tax exemption did not receive it at all (L4S\_NL\_exp\_21).

While the Dutch and Indian Governments have set certain framework conditions for the Indian-Dutch migration skill corridor, the practical implementation of these policies largely depends on the private sector. Therefore, we define this corridor as mostly private-led: “In practice, it's up to the employer to ensure staffing. Nationality doesn't matter. [...] I always said: if the person can do the job, their origin is irrelevant. But the employer holds primary responsibility” (L4S\_NL\_pol\_08). This has to do with “how we have organized the labour market in the Netherlands. The government has no formal role here when it comes to employment services, unlike in some of the countries around us” (L4S\_NL\_pol\_15).

As explained above, Indian migration to the Netherlands has developed rather organically without relying on specific programmes or initiatives to encourage migration. There are few examples of private sector initiatives to recruit Indian nurses to the Netherlands. These include small-scale projects to bring Indian nurses (operation room technicians/ surgery assistants)<sup>22</sup> to three Dutch hospitals, which otherwise would have had to close their operation rooms. “They went directly to recruit people in Bangalore, which was very unlikely of the Dutch system” (L4S\_NL\_exp\_23). In addition, there was a “recent attempt to bring six Indian nurses to HMC Haaglanden in The Hague, [which] failed due to challenges in candidate selection, strict nursing qualifications [BIG registration], and a mismatch with Dutch education” (L4S\_NL\_exp\_06). Another interviewee explained that “they found out that it was

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<sup>19</sup> See also this recent IOM report on the Orientation year: [https://iom-nederland.nl/images/StemTalent4NL/Final\\_Conference\\_Report\\_small.pdf](https://iom-nederland.nl/images/StemTalent4NL/Final_Conference_Report_small.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> Timm, L., Giuliadori, M., & Muller, P. (2022). Tax Incentives for High Skilled Migrants: Evidence from a Preferential Tax Scheme in the Netherlands. *IZA Discussion Paper Series*, (15582). <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4232711>

<sup>21</sup> For more information on the 30%-ruling see <https://www.government.nl/topics/income-tax/shortening-30-percent-ruling#:~:text=From1January2024,expatswhomeettheconditionsreceivethefollowingtaxbenefits:1.30%taxfreeforthefirst20months;2.20%taxfreeforthenext>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.rug.nl/research/ursi/prc/research/migration/care-from-india-exploring-indian-nurse-migration-and-reception-in-northern-netherlands?lang=en>

too complicated for them. [...] They couldn't manage themselves. That's a scare" (L4S\_NL\_17\_exp). In Flanders, Belgium, in contrast experiences with recruiting nurses from India were much more positive: "[The organization in Flanders] did it much better with Indian nurses and, yeah, they even helped them to get their families over and looking for work for their husbands etc. So that's another example" (L4S\_NL\_exp\_17).

Furthermore, private recruitment agencies are researching possibilities to recruit skilled workers (e.g., electricians, gas technicians) from India, but do not do so officially yet (L4S\_NL\_prac\_13). Indians' language skills (i.e., bilingualism and being native English speakers) are stated as reasons for why they are especially suited to come work in the Netherlands. In addition, "India is definitely attractive because of the sheer size of the labour market. But the cultural gap between India and the Netherlands is quite large. [...] That makes India more difficult as a recruitment region compared to, say, South Africa" (L4S\_NL\_prac\_13). This is contradictory compared to the experiences of another interviewee, who thought that Indian and Dutch people had "a common culture [and] values in life" (L4S\_NL-IND\_prac\_10), while at the same time acknowledging that there are cultural differences, which to a certain extent can be overcome through educating migrants and the receiving society. A possible explanation for this contradiction is that interviewees were talking about different migrant groups (medium compared to highly skilled workers), likely coming from different socio-economic backgrounds and with varying prior international exposure. Indeed, the second interviewee stated the following: "I think the Indians we see here, the expats and the highly skilled migrants are really like the top of the labour markets" (L4S\_NL-IND\_prac\_10). Interestingly, challenges related to cultural integration came up with one of the Indian government's recruiting officers who worked with a recruiting programme of Indian nurses to Germany, whose remarks can be applied to understand similar challenges in other European countries as well.

"Malayali nurses are known globally as a brand but when compared to the nurses Philippines, adaptation is a problem. Some struggle to fit into local culture. Still, once they settle, they maintain high standards and are in their comfort zone celebrating local festivals there" (L4S\_IND\_prac\_04).

Movies to provide information about cultural differences between India and the Netherlands were identified as a good practice to address cultural challenges (L4S\_NL-IND\_prac\_10).

These examples show that Indian migration to the Netherlands is rather ad hoc and unstructured. While there is a growing demand for medium-skilled workers in the Netherlands, the migration skill corridor in this regard remains rather empty and characterized by inaction of both the public and private sector. On the one hand, the government expects employers and employers' organizations, which thus far are perceived as "awfully quiet" and "hesitant", to "take the lead on this" (L4S\_NL\_pol\_15). At the same time, private companies are waiting for the government to take action. In particular, small and medium-sized enterprises lack the knowledge and capacity to recruit internationally (L4S\_NL-IND\_exp\_23). This results in a stalemate, as governments refrain from setting clear frameworks and instead expect private actors to take the initiative, while private actors in turn look to the state for guidance and support.

While before we zoomed in on Indian companies relocating to the Netherlands, Dutch companies also offshored to / set up a subsidiary in India. Philips and Shell for example moved their R&D facilities from the Netherlands to India (L4S\_NL-IND\_prac\_10; L4S\_NL-IND\_exp\_23) and there are a business link and strong collaboration between Indian and Dutch companies and startups to expand their market (L4S\_NL\_prac\_03). This can also have an effect on the Indian-Dutch migration skill corridor (L4S\_NL\_prac\_03; L4S\_NL-IND\_exp\_23). On the one hand, it can make migration from India to the Netherlands less necessary because Indians can work for large MNEs in India (L4S\_NL-IND\_exp\_23); usually at lower costs for the employer (L4S\_NL\_prac\_03). On the other hand, it can also make Indians more interested in coming to the Netherlands (see L4S\_NL\_prac\_02).

At the time of conducting the interviews in 2025, a right-wing government was in place in the Netherlands. The political situation and how it links to migration to the country or the work of the interviewed stakeholders was brought up in most of the interviews. Cuts in higher education, a reduction of the number of international students, and changes surrounding the 30%-ruling were often mentioned as having a negative impact on the attractiveness of the Netherlands for international talent. Alongside more selection in terms of which companies receive relocation support and an unpredictable government, this seems to have affected the business climate of the Netherlands (L4S\_NL\_prac\_01; L4S\_NL-IND\_prac\_10).<sup>23</sup> In addition, the Netherlands see a declining trend in other competitiveness indices, such as the World Competitiveness Ranking (L4S\_NL\_prac\_01).<sup>24</sup> Interviewees were worried that the anti-migration approach of the government went against current population developments (e.g., increasing skill shortages, aging population) (L4S\_NL-IND\_prac\_10). In general, the “ad hoc” nature of the corridor was criticised, and interviewees would like to see a more forward-looking and proactive approach to labour migration and addressing (future) skill shortages (L4S\_NL\_prac\_13; L4S\_NL-IND\_exp\_23).

Dutch skilled migration policy cannot move forward unless it is framed as a win-win for all parties involved, including the government, political parties, employers and employers’ organisations, Dutch society and migrants themselves.

“Most of the countries we currently cooperate with outside the EU are approached mainly through the lens of asylum and irregular migration. Of course, this differs per country: cooperation with Libya, Tunisia, or Egypt is really quite different from cooperation with Morocco, where the focus is particularly on return and return cooperation. It’s also closely related to asylum eligibility percentages, and the rights people have. And often, regular or labour migration only comes up because the partner country demands it, not because we ourselves put it on the table. Then we look at: what is our political space? What steps can we take?

That’s also the case with a country like India. We do have an interest there, but we don’t primarily engage with India for regular migration. We go there for other reasons, and then migration comes onto the table. At that point, we look at what room we have, and what we could possibly gain from it” (L4S\_NL\_pol\_15).

Governments thus refrain from setting clear frameworks and instead expect private actors to take the initiative, while private actors in turn look to the state for guidance and support, resulting in a stalemate. Our findings show that debates on skilled migration are shaped less by labour market needs than by broader political dynamics. Interviewees emphasized how populist discontent about the perceived social costs of low-skilled and irregular migration and concerns over the misuse of the knowledge migrant scheme (L4S\_NL\_prac\_07) restrict the scope for rational policymaking in support of (medium-)skilled migration, thereby ignoring the needs of companies and institutions. This marks a shift in the Netherlands: the populist voice seems stronger than the capitalist voice and prevents more balanced labour migration governance. The Dutch case illustrates how these “liberal paradoxes” constrain policy options to address pressing labour shortages.

## Indian Migration to the Netherlands: Trends and Drivers

Indians are the largest group of third-country nationals in the Netherlands in general and in many of the municipalities and regions where our interviewed stakeholders were based, which makes it an

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<sup>23</sup> See also <https://acbi.uva.nl/shared/uva/nl/nieuws/persberichten/2024/12/waardering-van-het-nederlandse-ondernemingsklimaat-daalt-opnieuw.html>

<sup>24</sup> See also <https://www.imd.org/entity-profile/netherlands-wcr/>

established corridor.<sup>25</sup> Apparently, the Netherlands is one of the most important destination countries for Indians in Europe, which is striking considering the size of the Netherlands. As with several European countries, India shares a well-established migration corridor with the Netherlands, which also includes a sizable Indian diaspora. While current Indian outflows to the Netherlands are smaller than those to other EU counterparts and more traditional destination countries, the corridor remains strategically significant. Its importance is likely to grow, particularly in light of the Indian government's emphasis on promoting global expansion of Indian startups and large corporate conglomerates.

In this regard, it is also interesting to look at connectivity between the two countries to allow for migration and mobility. India and the Netherlands are connected very well as the following quote illustrates:

“Indigo, which is a large Indian airline [is] setting up here [in the Netherlands]. For me that's a sign. If there would not be business, they would not set up here. So, we have Air India, we have KLM. They are big on India, but there's also Indigo. [...] It's a sign that they would never set up if there would not be growth, you know, so India is here to stay.” (L4S\_NL-IND\_prac\_10).

Indian migration to the Netherlands grew significantly after the knowledge migrant visa scheme (*Kennismigrantenregeling*) was introduced in October 2004 (L4S\_NL-IND\_exp\_23), which is why we can classify the Indian-Dutch migration skill corridor as a “highly skilled migration corridor”. While the number of (Indian) knowledge migrants to the Netherlands kept growing until 2022 (except for the years of the COVID-19 pandemic when mobility was restricted), 2023 and 2024 saw a decline in knowledge migration to the Netherlands in general and Indian knowledge migration specifically (Table 1).<sup>26</sup> To be precise, knowledge migration from India to the Netherlands declined by 29.1 per cent from 2023 to 2024, and by almost 50.0 per cent compared to 2022.<sup>27</sup> One of our interviewees explained that this was due to a “pause in the industry and fewer vacancies being advertised” (L4S\_NL\_prac\_01). At the same time, the Netherlands is experiencing a declining trend on various competitiveness rankings, which could also affect its attractiveness for highly skilled migrants (L4S\_NL\_prac\_01) and is exacerbated by the political situation and discussions about curbing migration, including international student mobility, budget cuts in higher education, and reductions in the 30% rule (L4S\_NL\_prac\_01, L4S\_NL\_prac\_02, L4S\_NL\_prac\_04, L4S\_NL-IND\_prac\_10). While interviewees on the Dutch side of the corridor, were careful in attributing these trends to migration policy and politics, an interviewee on the Indian side noted that the decline in knowledge migration was directly linked to Dutch migration policies. The increasingly restrictive policy environment and rising salary thresholds can be seen as the major underlying reason for Indian migration to decrease from 14,000 in 2022 to 9,000 in 2024 (L4S\_IND-NL\_exp\_1). At the same time, the number of family migrants to the Netherlands increased and for the first time surpassed labour/ knowledge migrants in 2023 (see Table 1).

During interviews, it was often mentioned that many Indians come to the Netherlands as Intra-corporate transferees (L4S\_NL\_prac\_02; L4S\_NL-IND\_prac\_10). In 2021, ICTs accounted for 7 per cent of all labour migrants from outside of the EU in 2021.<sup>28</sup> Information on how many come from India is not publicly available. Sometimes, Indian migrants strategically choose to come to the Netherlands as ICTs first to then switch employers and apply for a knowledge migrant visa to be able to stay in the Netherlands for longer.

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<sup>25</sup> van Gaalen, R., de Mooij, M., de Vries, F., Bras, V. and Zorlu, A. (2025). Komen en gaan van arbeidsmigranten in de periode 2005-2021. Retrieved September 2025 from <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/longread/statistische-trends/2025/komen-en-gaan-van-arbeidsmigranten-in-de-periode-2005-2021>

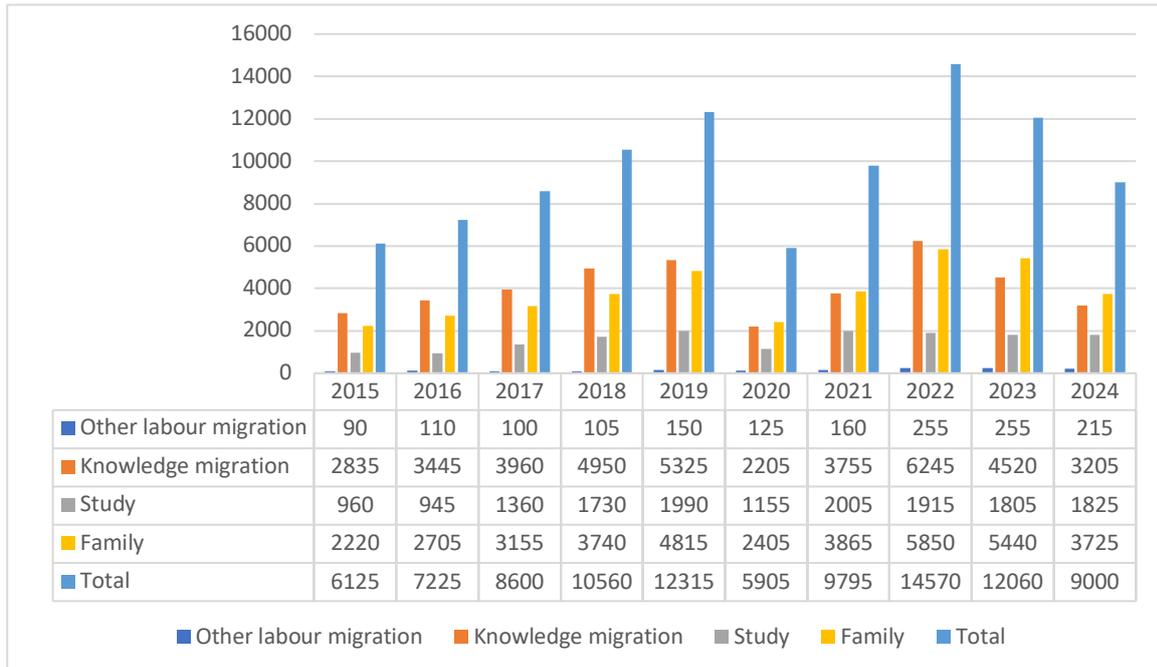
<sup>26</sup> See also <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/nieuws/2025/26/minder-immigratie-in-2024-vooral-minder-kennismigranten>

<sup>27</sup> At the time of finalizing this report, official statistics for 2025 were not available yet. It seems however, that this trend of declining Indian migration to the Netherlands continued as suggested in this article: <https://www.cbs.nl/en-gb/news/2026/06/population-growth-slows-for-third-consecutive-year>

<sup>28</sup> CBS (2023). Arbeidsmigrant van buiten de EU vaak een mannelijke kennismigrant. Retrieved September 2025 from <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/nieuws/2023/27/arbeidsmigrant-van-buiten-de-eu-vaak-een-mannelijke-kennismigrant>

“Many Indian IT professionals initially come to the Netherlands through the intra-company transfer route, especially through large Indian IT firms. This is a strategic choice. Working as an ICT allows them to gain international work experience while acclimatising to Dutch society. Over time, many of them switch employers and transition to a knowledge migrant visa, which offers greater stability and longer-term residence prospects. The initial period working within familiar corporate environments provides grounding for integration, including time to learn the language and understand local workplace norms. Interestingly, this pathway is also relevant for dependents who accompany ICT workers- it similarly enables gradual labour market entry and settlement planning” (L4S\_IND-NL\_exp\_1).

Table 1: Numbers of Indian Migrants coming to the Netherlands



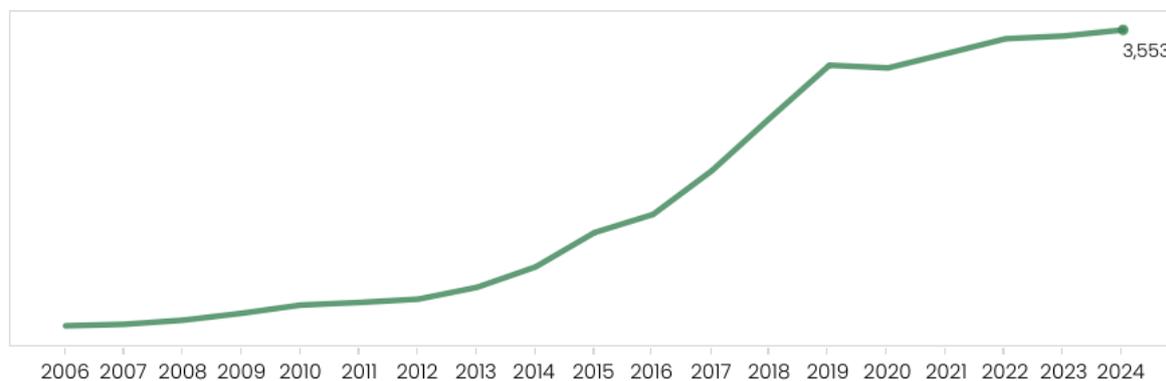
Source : CBS <https://opendata.cbs.nl/#/CBS/nl/dataset/84809NED/table?dl=C6A33>

Students from India were also mentioned as an important migrant group (L4S\_NL-IND\_prac\_10). They form the second-largest group of international students from outside of the EU in the Netherlands, behind China.<sup>29</sup> When it comes to international students studying engineering they are slightly in front of China (ibid). While Table 1 refers to the number of newly arrived Indian students by year, the data in Figure 1 includes all Indian students enrolled at Dutch higher education institutions per year.

“In 2024 alone, around 3,500 Indian students were admitted to Dutch universities. Institutions such as TU Delft, TU Eindhoven, Utrecht, Twente, and Groningen are particularly popular. At TU Delft, for instance, Indians constitute the second-largest non-EU group, with around 700 MSc students, over 200 PhD candidates, and over 100 faculty members.” (L4S\_IND\_NL\_exp\_1)

<sup>29</sup> Nuffic (2025). Countries of origin. Retrieved September 2025 from <https://www.nuffic.nl/en/countries-of-origin>

Figure 1: International degree students from India studying in the Netherlands



Source used: DUO | Last updated: 05-2025

Source: Nuffic (2025)

Indians are furthermore among the most frequently attracted entrepreneurs through specific start-up visa: "There are many Indian entrepreneurs who actually want to relocate to the Netherlands" (L4S\_NL\_exp\_11).

While it did not come up in our interviews on the Dutch side of the corridor, the number of posted workers from India – especially from Portugal - is also increasing (although the magnitude is unclear since official data is missing).<sup>30</sup> This can be a problem since the rights of posted workers are not protected very well (L4S\_NL\_exp\_21). Interviews on the Indian side, also, nothing specific on posted workers came up, but the lack of data from the origin country was raised as a concern.

"A challenge which often is not discussed is the lack of data available from India, although [the Ministry of External Affairs] is able to get aggregate numbers destination wise, but there are no sector specific or other variables that are available. Researchers and analysts like me are often reliant on destination country data, census and other aggregates to observe and study patterns" (L4S\_IND-NL\_exp\_01).

Indians in the Netherlands work especially in STEM and IT (L4S\_NL\_prac\_02; L4S\_NL\_exp\_06; L4S\_NL-IND\_prac\_10):

"Most people I see coming in are from top universities like IIT, Indian Institute of Technology. They become a director of an IT company like Tata Consultancy Services, TCS, Infosys, cognizant, Wipro Technologies, HCL technologies, those are the top five. But also, recently there's more migration in health, like Bilthoven Biologicals. It was a takeover of the Dutch Vaccine Institute. But also, in food like there is LT foods, which is a big rice company in Rotterdam. Uh, and they also work for banks in the Netherlands. Yeah. So, it's very diverse. Um, most Indians, when they come also, the spouse is very highly educated, and they also work then in those sectors. I see IT, consultancy like KPMG, PwC. We would say they're very STEM oriented." (L4S\_NL-IND\_prac\_10).

There are also some examples of Indian nurses coming to the Netherlands, especially since the salary threshold of the knowledge migrant scheme was reduced (L4S\_NL-IND\_exp\_23). Indian nurses are described as "supers killed" and have often done very specialist work in large hospitals in India (L4S\_NL-IND\_exp\_23).

<sup>30</sup> See IBO Arbeidsmigratie <https://open.overheid.nl/documenten/25c8f9ef-c50d-478d-8a7e-2e42c327f3f2/file#page6>

Indian highly skilled migrants often come with their spouses who are usually also highly educated. It is important that they also find their way to the labour market, for example through targeted support with language, recognition of qualifications, finding employment, etc. (L4S\_NL-IND\_prac\_10).

Highly skilled migrants from India are concentrated in two main regions: 1) The Amsterdam Metropolitan Region (especially Amstelveen), and 2) the region around Eindhoven (see figure 2).

“The most visible concentration is in the information technology sector, particularly in and around Eindhoven’s Brainport region, which is one of Europe’s leading high-technology clusters. This region hosts advanced manufacturing firms, semiconductor companies, and cutting-edge STEM research institutions” (L4S\_IND\_NL\_exp\_1).

In addition, many Surinamese Indians, so-called Hindustani Surinamese, are living in the Netherlands, especially in The Hague. These are Surinamese nationals of Indian origin whose ancestors migrated to Suriname as contract workers due to a shortage of plantation workers after slavery was abolished and then remained in the country. This indentured labour system was organised through agreements between the British and Dutch governments.<sup>31</sup> When the former Dutch colony Suriname became independent in 1975, many Surinamese Indians migrated to the Netherlands.<sup>32</sup> As a result of this intergenerational stepwise migration<sup>33</sup>, the Indian-Dutch migration skill corridor becomes a bit more complex and blurred with the post-colonial type (L4S\_NL-IND\_prac\_10). Today, there are 180,000 Surinamese Indians living in the Netherlands (including first, second and third generation migrants), thereby outnumbering Indian nationals, who directly came to the Netherlands from India.<sup>34</sup>

Finally, it was noted that Indian migrants in the Netherlands form a heterogeneous group that is segmented across communities from different regional, language, cultural or religious origins, which do not necessarily mingle (L4S\_NL\_prac\_18; L4S\_NL-IND\_exp\_23).

Migration is usually motivated by the interplay of different drivers.<sup>35</sup> Our interviewees mentioned the following motivations for Indian migrants to move to the Netherlands:

“Indian companies and expats choose the Netherlands because it’s centrally located between Asia and the US because most of them do business in all those continents. The connectivity with Schiphol airport and the many flights to Delhi, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Mumbai. And also, the fact that most people here speak English. I hear that Paris for example is a bit difficult. It’s easy to get around, [...] very international, 180 nationalities, a lot of international schools, [...] the availability of talents” (L4S\_NL-IND\_prac-10).

“Indian nurses do not migrate for higher wages, but for international experience and to grow their careers” (L4S\_NL-IND\_exp\_23).

In addition, Indian entrepreneurs cite a good start-up ecosystem, support for entrepreneurs, possibility to speak English, and the location in Europe as main reasons for wanting to move to the Netherlands. In their applications to the IND and RVO they also have to make very clear how their business adds value to the Dutch economy (L4S\_NL\_exp\_11).

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<sup>31</sup> Choenni, C. E. S. (2024). The Remigration of Hindostanis from Suriname to India, 1878–1921. In C. Bates (Ed.), *Beyond Indenture: Agency and Resistance in the Colonial South Asian Diaspora* (pp. 127–149). Chapter, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>32</sup> <https://npokennis.nl/story/615/waarom-wonen-er-veel-hindoestanen-in-nederland>

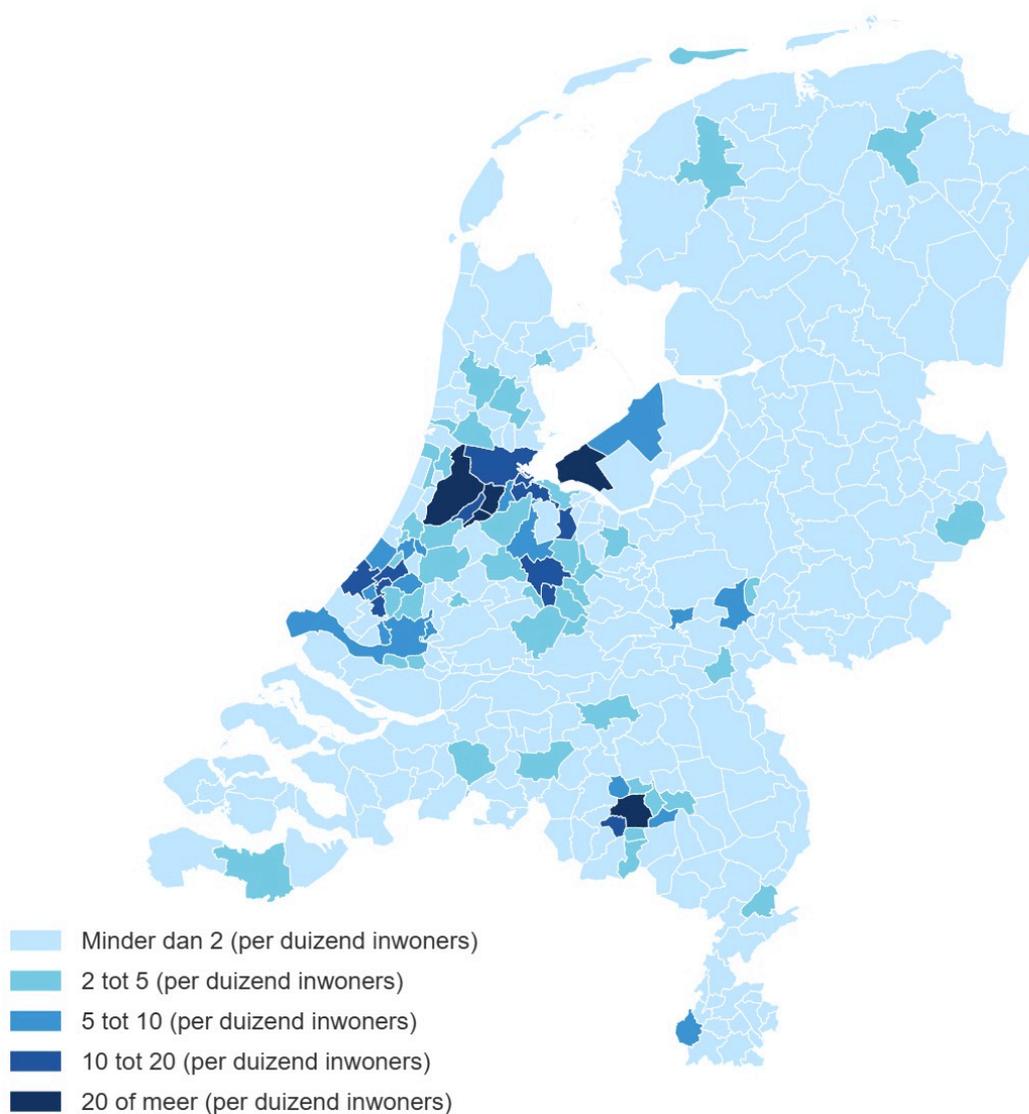
<sup>33</sup> Paul, A. M. (2011). Stepwise International Migration: A Multistage Migration Pattern for the Aspiring Migrant. *American Journal of Sociology*, 116(6), 1842–1886. <https://doi.org/10.1086/659641>

<sup>34</sup> <https://npokennis.nl/story/615/waarom-wonen-er-veel-hindoestanen-in-nederland>

<sup>35</sup> Reinold, J. & Czaika, M. (2026). The Pull Factors of High-Skilled Immigration and the Role of Policies. In M. Schiller and P. Scholten (Eds.), *Handbook on Migration and Public Policy* (pp.126-146). Edward Elgar Publishing, Cheltenham, UK. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781035327317.00018>

Results of the Link4Skills Migrant Survey suggest that Indian migrants chose to move to the Netherlands because of 1) professional development opportunities, 2) labour market conditions, 3) education opportunities, and 4) economic conditions.<sup>36</sup>

Figure 2: Indian residents in Dutch municipalities (1 January 2024)



Source: CBS

### Recruiting, integrating and retaining Indian migrants in the Netherlands

Indian migrants are mostly recruited to the Netherlands directly by companies, notably large multinational enterprises and Indian companies in NL (L4S\_NL\_prac\_02). Universities also play an important role in attracting Indian researchers and students to the Netherlands (L4S\_NL\_prac\_02; L4S\_NL-IND\_prac\_02). Employers are responsible for the practical implementation of labour migration policies, meaning that they are responsible for applying for workers' visa and work permit. If employers are registered as recognised sponsors, there is a fast-track procedure for applying for the knowledge

<sup>36</sup> Reinold, J., Engbersen, G., Grabowska, I., Chrol, E., Kyliushyk, I., Schwenken, H., Ullmann, J., Hendow, M., Huss, D., Triandafyllidou, A. & Shirazi, H. (2025). *Link4Skills Migrant Survey Restricted Access Variant. V1*. [Data set] DANS Data Station Social Sciences and Humanities, <https://doi.org/10.17026/SS/1IKONT>

migrant scheme. Becoming a recognised sponsor can be cumbersome and time consuming, especially for SMEs and start-ups who may not yet be able to provide all of the required documentation.<sup>37</sup> Applying for one knowledge migrant scheme costs 405 Euros and is paid by the employer. The IND (Dutch Immigration and Naturalisation Service) has to take a decision within 90 days, with possible extensions in case of procedural complications or missing documentation.<sup>38</sup> Employers can receive support with visa applications and becoming a recognised sponsor from the IND or the expat centres.

One interviewed private recruitment agency is exploring the option to recruit from India but does not recruit from there yet. India is an interesting country of origin for companies because of the “sheer size of the labour market” (L4S\_NL\_prac\_13) and the share of unemployed medium-skilled workers (L4S\_NL-IND\_exp\_23). Some companies in NL target especially Indian university graduates in STEM and IT to attract them to NL (L4S\_NL\_prac\_03; L4S\_NL\_prac\_04), also universities are targeted to attract entrepreneurs (L4S\_NL\_prac\_04; L4S\_NL\_exp\_11). In addition, skilled Indian workers often migrate to the Netherlands as intra-corporate transferees. One interviewee (L4S\_NL\_prac\_1) emphasized the strong presence of Indian communities in the region of Eindhoven, which serves as an important gateway for attracting STEM talent. Due to established brand awareness and active community networks, talent attraction from India largely occurs through referrals rather than targeted advertising. Civil society initiatives and community representatives, including those involved in the international talent programme’s sounding board, play a role in supporting this process.

While for established companies the recruitment process seems to go rather smoothly, there are also challenges especially when it comes to sectors or professions where recruitment from India is rather new, e.g., in healthcare. A consortium of care organisations that wanted to recruit from India, found out that it was too complicated to do this by themselves (L4S\_NL\_exp\_17). Similarly, it is difficult for SMEs to navigate the international recruitment process due to a lack of experience, knowledge and capacities (L4S\_NL\_exp\_06; L4S\_NL-IND\_exp\_23).<sup>39</sup> “You can’t just go to India and recruit people and then say Ok now you need to start working here.” (L4S\_NL-IND\_exp\_23). Inability to recruit internationally can have severe consequences and have been cited as a reason “why many startups fail” (L4SNL-IND\_exp\_23).

In addition, recruiting can be difficult because apart from the knowledge migrant scheme, Dutch labour migration policy is rather restrictive. If migrants, for example, earn salaries below the threshold to qualify for the knowledge migrant scheme, migration may not be possible (L4S\_NL\_exp\_06). This can be especially problematic for employers who have a demand for talent but cannot pay such high salaries. On the Indian side as well, recruiters, particularly those engaged in hiring for external employers, including government-linked agencies involved in Government to Government (G2G) recruitment for other destination countries, have expressed concerns regarding the Netherlands corridor. These concerns relate to the largely unstructured nature of recruitment offers, limited coordination mechanisms, and constraints arising from the absence of formal verification and standardised processes.

“Many people are cheated when trying to go to countries like the Netherlands due to a lot of advertising about opportunities. Unlike in the case of Germany, India has not signed any formal mobility agreement with Netherlands. So, there are less programmes by the government between the two countries. Many do not go through fair practice. There are many cases where they overstay their visa and going in wrong visa types like visiting visas” (L4S\_IND\_prac\_04).

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<sup>37</sup> Reinold, J. (2023). Essays on attracting and retaining highly educated migrants. [Doctoral Dissertation]. Maastricht University. <https://doi.org/10.26481/dis.20231005jr>

<sup>38</sup> <https://ind.nl/nl/verblijfsvergunningen/werken/kennismigrant#procedures-en-kosten>

<sup>39</sup> Reinold, J. (2023). Essays on attracting and retaining highly educated migrants. [Doctoral Dissertation]. Maastricht University. <https://doi.org/10.26481/dis.20231005jr>

Skilling and training usually happen in the country of origin, before migrants are recruited by Dutch companies. The largest group of highly skilled migrants and intra-corporate transferees likely completed higher education in India or another country before coming to the Netherlands. Learning Dutch is usually not a prerequisite for starting a job in the Netherlands, but many migrants follow language courses once they arrived in the Netherlands. This may be facilitated by the employer or happen on their own initiative. There are plans to make language support a requirement for employers to establish it as a component of good human resource policy (L4S\_NL\_pol\_08) Upon arrival in the Netherlands, highly skilled migrants learn on the job, which may take a considerable amount of time, which is why it is usually in the interest of the employer that the migrant stays with the company longer (L4S\_NL\_prac\_03; L4S\_NL\_09\_prac).

The situation is a bit more complex in the case of nurse migration. Recruiting nurses from India to the Netherlands can be a challenge because of different systems. The Indian nursing system is “very much based on the British system” and therefore different from the Dutch system (L4S\_NL-IND\_exp\_23). Nurses are required to learn Dutch and have to go through a complex registration process to be allowed to practice their profession in the Netherlands. This process, which may require additional training and examinations usually takes place in the Netherlands (L4S\_NL\_prac\_12; L4S\_NL\_prac\_13; L4S\_NL\_exp\_17; L4S\_NL-IND\_exp\_23). This is the case for all international nurses coming to the Netherlands, and not specific to the Indian-Dutch corridor (see also next section on recognition for more details).

Sometimes there are also more exchanges between subsidiaries in India and NL, meaning that workers are trained / gain work experience in both countries for a limited period (L4S\_NL\_prac\_03; L4S\_NL\_prac\_13).

The recognition of qualifications is commonly emphasized as problematic, especially in the healthcare sector (L4S\_NL\_exp\_06). This holds for all international migrants and is not specific to the Indian case. As mentioned above, international nurses coming to the Netherlands need to acquire a BIG registration to be legally and practically allowed to work as a nurse, which is very time consuming and causes delays in starting dates or leads to nurses working below their skill levels (e.g., professionally trained nurses working as care givers) (L4S\_NL\_prac\_12; L4S\_NL\_prac\_13; L4S\_NL\_exp\_17; L4S\_NL-IND\_exp\_23). The CIBG<sup>40</sup> maintains the BIG register. The challenging part is that international nurses need to prove that they can work in all areas of nursing, not only the one that they are specialised in or meant to work in in the Netherlands. This makes the process especially cumbersome, causing unnecessary delays. More flexibility would be required from the CIBG to focus the registration/ recognition process on the areas that nurses will be working on in the Netherlands (L4S\_NL\_prac\_12; L4S\_NL\_prac\_13). Besides nurses, there are also other professions that need to be registered in the BIG, including clinical technologist, dentist, doctor, health psychologist, midwife, pharmacist, physiotherapist, physician assistant, psychotherapist and remedial educationalist.<sup>41</sup> Nurses who have done very specialist work in India, are at risk of de-skilling or working below their skills levels in the Netherlands as a consequence of the complicated registration/ recognition process (L4S\_NL-IND\_exp\_23). All workers in the Netherlands, disregarding their skill level or employment sector, should have the right to improve their skills (L4S\_NL\_exp\_21).

STEM occupations that most Indian highly skilled migrants work in in the Netherlands do not require recognition. They are, however, not free of challenges: One example that was mentioned is that mid-level executives can experience barriers to their professional development and career advancement: “They reach a sort of glass ceiling, after which they can't grow any further” (L4S\_NL-IND\_exp\_23). While the glass ceiling usually refers to barriers in the career advancement of women, the example

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<sup>40</sup> <https://www.cibg.nl/>

<sup>41</sup> <https://english.bigregister.nl/registration>

mentioned here also applies to men. To seek a way out of this, Indian migrants frequently engage in self-employment (ibid.).

Upon arrival in the Netherlands, expat and international centres provide support for highly skilled migrants from different origins. The interviewees confirm their importance for highly skilled migrants in the Netherlands, including for Indians (L4S\_NL\_prac\_01; L4S\_NL\_prac\_02; L4S\_NL\_prac\_14; L4S\_NL-IND\_prac\_10; L4S\_NL\_prac\_18; L4S\_NL-IND\_prac\_23):

“In every big city in the Netherlands, there is an expat centre, and this set up, you know, it’s a red-carpet treatment” (L4S\_NL-IND\_prac\_10).

“The welcome centres also play a big role for skilled migrants. I think they are also great” (L4S\_NL-IND\_exp\_23).

One interviewee also mentioned that the main audience on the Welcome to NL website<sup>42</sup> is Indian. “So, I think in India, they know how to find the Netherlands very well and that you can see this conversion online on our website.” (L4S\_NL\_prac\_04). On this website, (prospective) migrants can find information about migrating, living and working in the Netherlands and can also download the Welcome to NL Relocation App, “a guide to make [their] transition to the Netherlands as smooth as possible, and includes all the steps [they] will have to take. So, [they] know what to arrange before [they] move to the Netherlands, upon arrival and when settling in” (L4S\_NL\_prac\_04). Indian community organisations also provide information for prospective or recent migrants (L4S\_NL-IND\_exp\_23).

Providing information about cultural differences (e.g., movies about Dutch culture) can facilitate economic and social integration (L4S\_NL-IND\_10\_prac). It is also considered important to integrate the spouses of skilled migrants “who often lack knowledge of the Dutch labour market and do not have a professional network” (L4S\_NL\_prac\_18). Indian community organisations also play their part and rose significantly from very few in the early 2000s to more than 200 today (L4S\_NL-IND\_exp\_23). These organisations are divided alongside regional, cultural and religious origins of Indian migrants.

Housing has been mentioned as a key challenge associated with labour migration to the Netherlands in general including for Indian migration (L4S\_NL\_exp\_06; L4S\_NL\_prac\_07; L4S\_NL-IND\_prac\_10). The housing crisis in the Netherlands makes it difficult for migrants and natives to find accommodation.<sup>43</sup> Migrants are often blamed for exacerbating the situation. Those who are beneficiaries of the 30% ruling may have a comparatively bigger net salary to spend and are therefore accused of “buying the best houses in the Randstad” (L4S\_NL-IND\_10\_prac). One interviewee stated that of course an increasingly diverse society affects the housing market and public services, which according to her “this is a reality we need to anticipate and respond to” (L4S\_NL\_prac\_18).

Recent trends suggest that Indians increasingly stay in the Netherlands for longer periods of time (L4S\_NL\_exp\_06; L4S\_NL-IND\_exp\_10; L4S\_NL-IND\_exp\_23)<sup>44</sup>: “The Netherlands has also changed in a way that earlier it was very much an escalator region that people came here, worked for a few years, and then left for some other to, to UK or to the US. You see also a change now in people staying if they

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<sup>42</sup> <https://www.welcome-to-nl.nl/>

<sup>43</sup> For Indian migrants in the Netherlands who participated in the L4S Migrant survey, housing is indeed mentioned as the by far most serious challenge they faced in the Netherlands (Reinold et al., 2025).

<sup>44</sup> See also: <https://www.cbs.nl/en-gb/news/2025/10/migrants-from-india-are-staying-longer-in-the-netherlands> and <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/longread/statistische-trends/2025/komen-en-gaan-van-arbeidsmigranten-in-de-periode-2005-2021>

would buy a house or have children or so, then they're more likely to stay" (L4S\_NL-IND\_exp\_23).<sup>45</sup> In general, retention is more likely, if the migrant's partner is also employed (ibid.).<sup>46</sup>

"Most Indians I know, they stay, to be honest. They stay because life is good here. [...] Everybody speaks English. So, I see very many people stay here. Good schools..." (L4S\_NL-IND\_prac\_10).

Migration from India to non-GCC destinations for work or study is increasingly shaped by long-term settlement aspirations rather than return-oriented mobility. Even in sectors such as nursing, existing research shows that GCC countries have often functioned as temporary stops, with many nurses remigrating to European destinations when opportunities arise, particularly given the limited structure of direct recruitment from India.<sup>47</sup> Indians have always systematically pursued permanent residency in destination countries, with the intention of reunifying with dependents, including spouses, children, and, where possible, parents. In this context, the Netherlands and other European countries have gained strategic importance for Indian migrants with settlement ambitions. This shift has been further reinforced by policy changes in more traditional destinations such as the United Kingdom and Canada, which have recently restricted dependency visas for student migrants, previously one of the most significant entry pathways for Indians. As a result, Europe is increasingly perceived as a viable alternative for long-term mobility and family-based settlement. Another reason Indian migrants show limited interest in circular migration or return is the lack of viable opportunities and adequate reintegration infrastructure in India. Although central and state governments have introduced return-oriented programmes over the years, researchers have frequently criticised these initiatives for being fragmented and ineffective, making them largely unattractive to migrants considering long-term return.<sup>48</sup>

Few interviewees support the concept of circular migration, which holds that migration should also benefit countries of origin. It is furthermore seen as a way to assuage a "widespread fear" of labour migrants not returning. (L4S\_NL\_prac\_09). Apart from that, circular migration programmes seem to be justified by the fact that "research shows [that] most labour migrants return within ten years. Circular migration is already happening in practice, even if not by design" (L4S\_NL\_prac\_09). This is also mirrored by the approach a Dutch private recruitment agency is taking when it comes to recruiting nurses from the Philippines and Indonesia. This may not be surprising given that circular migration aligns strongly with the business model of private recruitment agencies:

"I believe that much of labour migration is naturally circular. Studies show that 60 to 70 percent of labour migrants return to their country of origin within ten years. Many people prefer to eventually return to the place where they were born. It's also part of our policy that we specifically recruit people who want to come for five years. For example, someone with a family who consciously decides to work in the Netherlands for five years so they can later offer their children better educational opportunities. Those are the kinds of people who apply for our program. People who want to migrate permanently won't choose us. We make that distinction very clearly during the recruitment phase because we select those who are explicitly opting for a five-year stay. And after those five years, we ensure they return to an upgraded job. For instance, a nurse who's worked five years in Dutch healthcare will return to the Philippines or Indonesia with valuable experience, potentially becoming a trainer, department manager, or team leader. We aim to create

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<sup>45</sup> This is confirmed by official statistics <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/nieuws/2025/10/immigranten-uit-india-blijven-langer-in-nederland-wonen>

<sup>46</sup> <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/nieuws/2025/02/arbeidsmigrant-met-werkende-partner-blijft-steeds-vaker-in-nederland>

<sup>47</sup> Rajan, S. I., & Arcand, J. L. (2024). COVID-19 return migration phenomena: Experiences from South and Southeast Asia. In *COVID-19 Return Migration Phenomena* (pp. 1-20). Routledge.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

upward mobility upon return, making it attractive to go back. We have partnerships with hospitals in the Philippines and Indonesia to make this possible” (L4S\_NL\_prac\_13).

Most interviewees are rather critical of circular migration programmes:

“I’m cautious about how the term “circular migration” is used. Often, it’s deployed opportunistically. In practice, genuine circular migration rarely exists. We can’t force someone to leave if they’ve built a life here. If someone contributes to the labour market, they may stay—and that’s not necessarily a bad thing” (L4S\_NL\_pol\_08).

“From a migrant perspective, I think it’s a bit patriarchal to think about that. Oh, you come work for us and then you go back and it’s still a very colonial system of thinking. [...] I mean, who are we to decide futures of skilled migrants? [...] To tell a skilled migrant come work for us for four years and then go back and, you know, develop your country that I find is a very colonial approach to migration” (L4S\_NL-IND\_exp\_23).

Employers working with this recruitment agency seem to “have been brainwashed” (L4S\_NL\_exp\_17) into supporting circular migration schemes by recruitment agencies trying to increase their profits. Economically, it does not seem to make sense to invest in the recruitment and skilling of migrant workers, which as pointed out above can be a lengthy process (e.g., BIG registration of foreign nurses), only for them to leave again after a limited number of years. “Sometimes it can take up to two years to get somebody to be able to function independently on the Dutch labour market” (L4S\_NL\_20\_exp). Enforcing circularity would thus mean a loss of investment for the employer. This goes for labour migration in general and is not specific for the Indian-Dutch corridor. These contradictions highlight the need to critically assess whose interest mobility partnerships and related initiatives actually serve.

### Policy recommendations

Most interviewees agree that the Netherlands needs to take a more forward-looking and proactive stance regarding skilled migration, which may include more structured government agreements to facilitate the migration of different groups of talent, including students, medium- and highly skilled migrants. These could focus on encouraging talent to study in the Netherlands and remain afterwards and also opening specific channels for medium-skilled migrants who do not meet the salary threshold to migrate through the knowledge migrant scheme (L4S\_NL-IND\_exp\_23).

This means anticipating which skills will be needed in ten years and preparing accordingly (L4S\_NL\_prac\_13; L4S\_IND-NL\_exp\_23). Some stakeholders cautioned that migration strategies should not treat India as a monolithic whole but rather target specific regions where the relevant talent is concentrated. Transparent, regional-level data can help recruiters and talent attraction programmes identify the right talent abroad, while also ensuring that recruitment does not contribute to brain drain (L4S\_NL\_prac\_01).

In a next step, it should be explored how Indian workers could be trained to fill skill shortages (for example in healthcare), for example, through fostering cooperation with knowledge institutes in India. This cooperation should be a shared responsibility of the public and private sector and could even involve insurance companies in the case of healthcare migration (L4S\_NL-IND\_exp\_23). Competing with traditional destinations of Indian skilled migrants, such as the Gulf states, Canada, Australia, and the UK, requires the Netherlands to highlight its own strengths, for instance in professional development opportunities. At the same time, it is important to also make the healthcare sector more attractive for Dutch workers, who often leave their jobs due to unattractive working conditions (L4S\_NL\_exp\_21).

Employers also need greater support and capacity-building in attracting international talent, particularly SMEs. Practical help is required on how to become a recognised sponsor, how to apply for

permits, and how to navigate administrative requirements (L4S\_NL-IND\_06, L4S\_NL\_prac\_14, L4S\_NL-IND\_exp\_23). A complementary migration scheme would therefore be needed to attract medium-skilled workers (L4S\_NL\_exp\_23).

Better coordination between different actors on both sides of the corridor is warranted:

“We definitely need more agreements to exchange knowledge, to inform potential talents, in our case, potential talent at universities in India about the different opportunities in the Netherlands, the different sectors in the Netherlands. [...] I do think we need to step up again and arrange these collaborations” (L4S\_NL\_prac\_04).

An ideal scenario would be to have closer contacts with universities whose graduates are also eligible for the Orientation Year visa in the Netherlands. She further stressed the value of connecting Dutch actors to Indian startup hubs and informing potential founders about opportunities related to the Dutch startup visa.

In addition, interviewees stressed the importance of retaining highly skilled migrants by supporting their families. Facilitating the labour market integration of spouses accompanying Indian workers is seen as key, since many partners are highly skilled themselves. Ensuring both partners can pursue careers not only fosters retention but also contributes to the Dutch labour market. This requires better information provision and support in building professional networks, with responsibility shared between employers and municipalities. Some municipalities, such as Amstelveen, already commit to ensuring all residents have access to suitable employment or education (L4S\_NL-IND\_18).<sup>49</sup>

Public-private cooperation was repeatedly highlighted as a promising model (L4S\_NL-IND\_13; L4S\_NL\_pol\_15):

“Public-private cooperation can be very powerful. Private parties often move faster and act more pragmatically than purely public systems. But a combination could work well. Imagine if the Dutch government selected a few strategic countries and invested in large-scale language schools and cultural training programs to prepare people for working in the Netherlands. Then a private company could handle the logistics and job placements on the Dutch side. That partnership model could be very effective” (L4S\_NL-IND\_13).

Some interviewees pointed to the need for circular and return-oriented approaches. For example, one practitioner described collaborating with hospitals and universities in India to prepare nurses for working in the Netherlands while also ensuring good job opportunities upon return. Extending such support to all migrants—regardless of whether they were recruited through circular initiatives or not—could help align recruitment with both Dutch needs and professional development goals of migrants (L4S\_NL-IND\_13\_prac).

Finally, interviewees mentioned that before encouraging migration from third countries, it is imperative to create better working conditions for all workers and ensure that the rights of European migrants already in the Netherlands, need to be better protected (L4S\_NL\_exp\_21). In addition, bilateral agreements governing migration from third countries should not be used as a way around EU legislation as there is a risk of lowering standards of migrant workers’ rights (ibid.). In addition, interviewees caution that the introduction of more bilateral agreements can lead to more fragmentation. While they hold advantages in terms of offering “more tailor made routes” they also risk that migrants cannot oversee what their rights are anymore (ibid.).

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<sup>49</sup> See also <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/nieuws/2025/10/immigranten-uit-india-blijven-langer-in-nederland-wonen>

## Conclusion

The India–Netherlands migration skill corridor is characterized by highly skilled mobility, especially in STEM, IT, and limited initiatives in healthcare. It is an established but ad hoc and private sector–driven corridor, with limited direct state-led agreements. Indian migration to the Netherlands accelerated after the 2004 introduction of the knowledge migrant scheme, which simplified visa procedures and allowed spouses to work. Today, most Indians move as knowledge migrants or intra-company transferees (ICTs), complemented by growing student, entrepreneurial, and family migration.

There are no formal bilateral agreements on skilled migration, though cooperation on social security and double taxation exists. The Dutch government’s approach has largely been to attract companies, which in turn bring Indian employees. Initiatives such as start-up visas, the orientation year for graduates, and the 30% tax ruling have boosted attractiveness, though recent restrictions (e.g., cuts to the 30% rule, reduced higher education budgets) risk undermining this.

Indians are now the largest group of third-country labour migrants in the Netherlands. Migration flows grew steadily until 2022, but knowledge migration dropped sharply since 2023 due to a slowdown in vacancies, tighter political debates on migration, and declining Dutch competitiveness. Family migration, however, increased and surpassed labour migration in 2023. Pull factors include the Netherlands’ central location, English proficiency, international schools, strong startup ecosystem, and career opportunities.

Recruitment is mainly handled by large companies and universities, while SMEs struggle with limited capacities to attract Indian knowledge workers. Skill recognition is a major challenge in healthcare, with lengthy BIG registration processes forcing some professionals to work below their qualification level. Housing shortages and changes to tax benefits also create challenges.

At the time of finalizing this report, it seems that Indian migration to the Netherlands has further declined in 2025.<sup>50</sup> This is likely due to the challenges identified in this report, political insecurities and recent labour market developments.<sup>51</sup> At the same time, strengthened EU-India relations promise increased skill mobility from India to the European Union.<sup>52</sup> It will be interesting to observe what exactly these opposing trends mean for the future Indian-Dutch migration skill corridor.

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<sup>50</sup> <https://www.cbs.nl/en-gb/news/2026/06/population-growth-slows-for-third-consecutive-year>

<sup>51</sup> ASML, one of the most important employers for Indian knowledge migrants in the region of Eindhoven, for example announced to reduce 1,700 jobs, see <https://www.dutchnews.nl/2026/01/after-record-year-asml-is-to-cut-1700-jobs-mainly-in-nl/>

<sup>52</sup> <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/nri/study/india-eu-seal-landmark-mobility-pact-indian-professionals-students-set-to-benefit/articleshow/127642725.cms>

## Appendix: List of interviews

Interviews were conducted with three policy makers, 12 practitioners and nine experts working in the field of skilled migration in India or the Netherlands, or within the Indian-Dutch migration skill corridor. They are marked as \_pol, \_prac, or \_exp respectively in the references to interviews.

Corridor specific interviews	General interviews
L4S_NL-IND_prac_10	L4S_NL_prac_01
L4S_NL-IND_exp_23	L4S_NL_prac_02
L4S_IND_NL_exp_1	L4S_NL_prac_03
	L4S_NL_prac_04
	L4S_NL_exp_05
	L4S_NL_exp_06
	L4S_NL_prac_07
	L4S_NL_pol_08
	L4S_NL_prac_09
	L4S_NL_exp_11
	L4S_NL_prac_13
	L4S_NL_prac_14
	L4S_NL_pol_15
	L4S_NL_exp_17
	L4S_NL_prac_18
	L4S_NL_exp_19
	L4S_NL_exp_20
	L4S_NL_exp_21
	L4S_NL_pol_24
	L4S_IND_prac_4
	L4S_IND_prac_5

*Note: We only provide a clean list here to protect interviewees anonymity.*