

## Migration Skill Corridor Brief

# India-Austria

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Focusing on skilled mobility in healthcare, STEM occupations, and higher education, this brief examines the emerging India-Austria migration skill corridor. It explores recruitment initiatives, qualification recognition, and the role of the 2023 Migration and Mobility Partnership Agreement in strengthening cooperation on migration, mobility, and skills development. The analysis highlights promising practices as well as persistent challenges affecting fair and efficient labour mobility.

This Migration Skill Corridor Brief is part of a Link4Skills compact publication series examining labour mobility and skills mobility pathways between select countries across Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Americas. Based on the project's more extensive Migration Skill Corridor reports, the briefs provide concise analyses of migration dynamics, policy frameworks, good practices, and challenges shaping skills mobility, with the aim of supporting fair, sustainable, and mutually beneficial migration pathways.

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## 1. Executive summary

The India-Austria migration skills corridor is a (re-)emerging corridor characterised by a strong alignment of skills demand and supply, particularly in the healthcare and the STEM sector. Mobility from India, initially facilitated by church networks and formal agreements in the 1970s, is now primarily shaped by a diverse set of recruitment initiatives involving provincial authorities, public and private employers, recruitment agencies and (partly church-based) intermediaries, some of which build on earlier networks. In addition to employer-based initiatives aimed at recruiting skilled professionals, Austrian universities are also increasingly seeking to attract students from India in response to declining enrolment numbers. After graduation, many are highly sought after in Austria's labour market, equipped with Austrian degrees, German proficiency, cross-cultural understanding, and a strong tendency to stay long term.

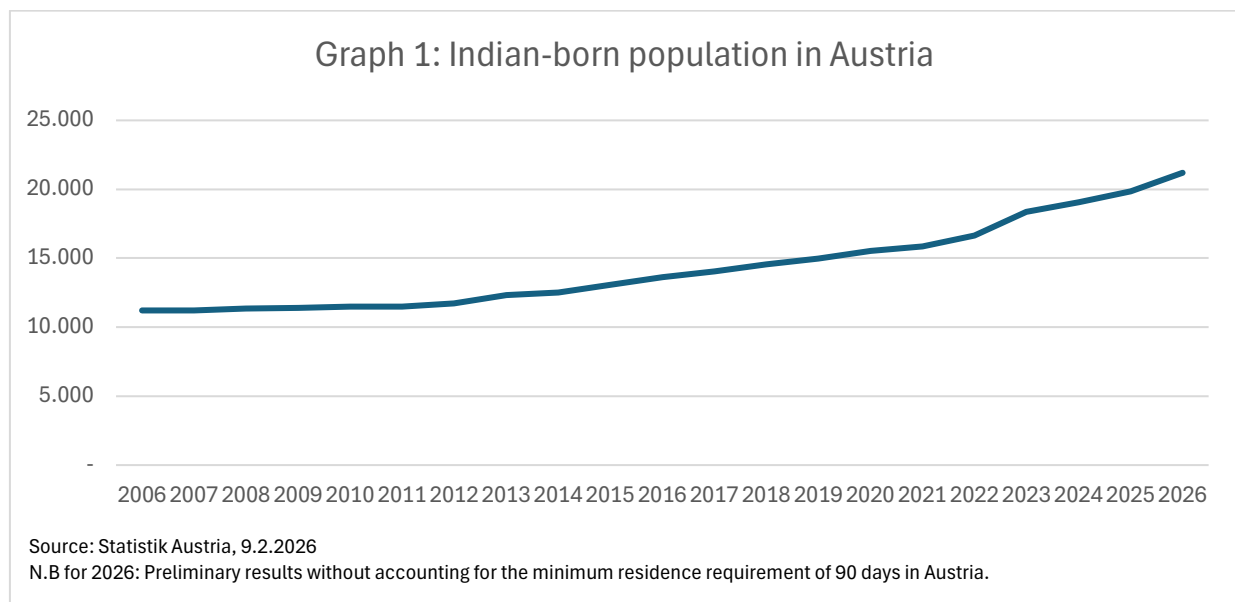
Rather than constituting a unified recruitment system, these initiatives operate in a rather uncoordinated manner, deploying a range of strategies to address challenges related to talent attraction, qualification recognition, language acquisition, and integration. While they are effective in mitigating bottlenecks such as slow and unpredictable qualification recognition procedures, they largely compensate for, rather than resolve, the underlying structural inefficiencies. At the same time, unethical recruitment practices continue to affect the India-Austria skills migration corridor, particularly in India, where the enforcement of migrant worker protection regulations remains weak.

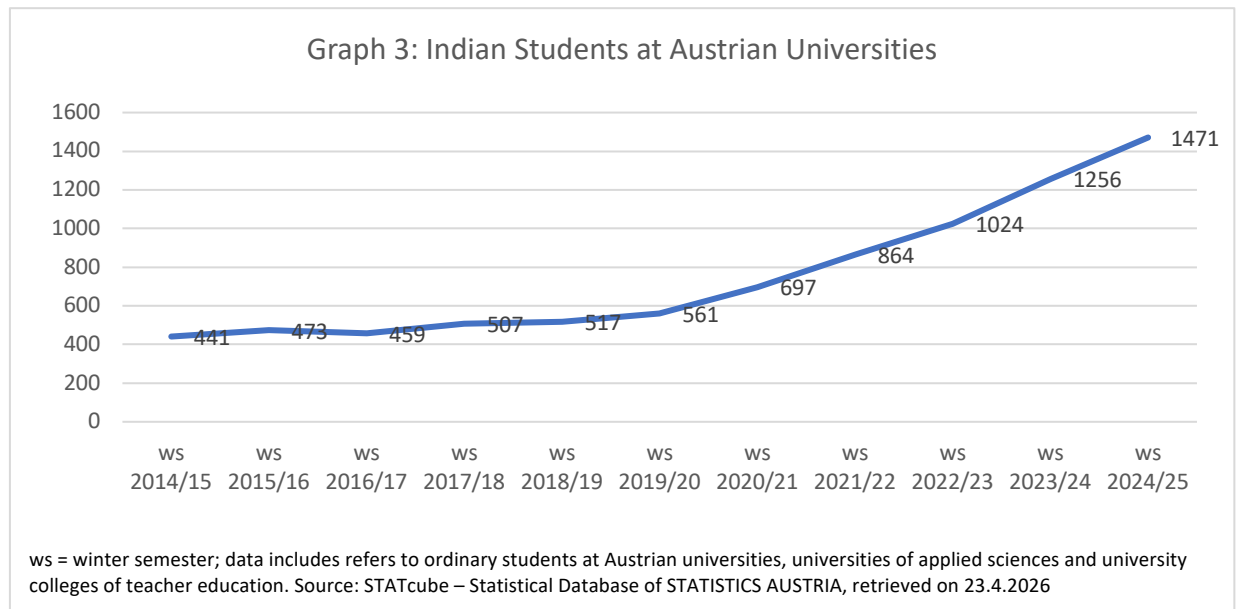
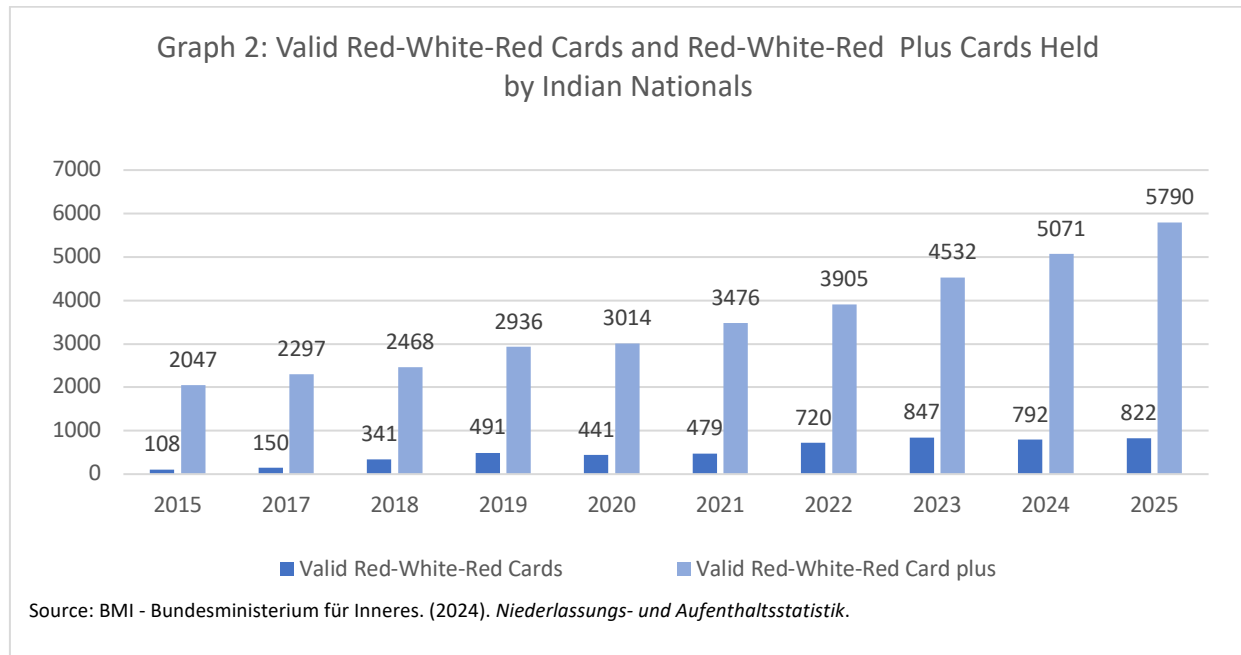
At the national level, cooperation between India and Austria deepened with the 2023 Comprehensive Migration and Mobility Agreement (MMPA). Focusing on information-sharing and cooperation, this agreement does not create new pathways for migration and mobility. Instead, labour mobility from India to Austria continues to take place primarily through pre-existing schemes, such as the Austrian Red-White-Red Card - Austria's employer-linked residence and work permit for skilled professionals from non-EU countries. However, it has created institutional momentum and political legitimacy for cooperation on education and skills development. For example, a student recruitment initiative driven by Technical University Leoben, has gained visibility in the context of a state visit linked to the agreement, leading to significant broadening of the initiative as well as funding by the Austrian Ministry of Science. In the field of dual vocational training, skills development, and qualification recognition, a 2026 letter of intent concretises plans for the further operationalisation of the MMPA, envisaging, among other measures, the development of a pre-check register, which pre-assesses vocational qualifications with the aim to facilitate the mutual recognition of occupational skills.

This shows that while the India-Austria corridor is largely sustained through individual network-based recruitment initiatives, the potential to generate synergies among these initiatives has not yet been fully exploited. At the national level, cooperation in the areas of migration, mobility and skilling deepens with the 2023 MMPA. The extent to which these frameworks will shape the future development of the corridor will become clearer as their implementation unfolds.

## 2. Migration dynamics

India is emerging as an increasingly important origin country of skilled professionals for Austria, building on earlier migration of nurses from Kerala in the 1970s and 1980s. With 21,200 Indian-born residents living in Austria (graph 1) – mainly residing in Vienna (11,109), followed by Lower Austria (2,462) and Upper Austria (2,056) - India is today still far behind the much larger and historically more significant labour migration flows from former guest worker countries, such as Türkiye or the states of the former Yugoslavia. However, the migration of skilled professionals from India has gained increasing importance, as reflected in the nearly eightfold rise in the number of Indian nationals holding valid Red-White-Red (RWR) Cards - Austria's residence and work permit for skilled professionals from non-EU countries. The number increased from 108 in 2015 to 822 in 2025, placing India among the top five countries of origin for RWR Card holders (graph 2). Student migration is increasing as well, with the number of Indian students more than tripling from 441 in the winter semester 2014/15 to 1,471 in 2024/25 (graph 3). These developments reflect active recruitment efforts by employers and universities alike to attract talent and students from India, particularly in STEM and healthcare fields, in response to labour market needs and declining student enrolment numbers. While these numbers may be relevant for Austria, they remain comparatively modest relative to India's population size. From the Indian perspective, however, Austria holds strategic importance as it offers access to EU-wide mobility at a time when traditional destination countries, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada, are imposing increasingly restrictive entry policies.





### 3. Policies and agreements

In 2023, cooperation on migration between India and Austria deepened with the MMPA. This agreement provides for cooperation on temporary migration, on the facilitation of fair mobility, as well as cooperation in the areas of return, the fight against irregular migration, human trafficking and document fraud. In the field of labour migration it focuses on sharing information about existing legal migration options and enhancing cooperation in education and training. A 2026 letter of intent regarding dual vocational training, skills development and the recognition of vocational qualifications reflects the intention to further deepen cooperation in these areas, for example by exploring possibilities to implement a pre-check register, which simplifies the

comparability of pre-assessed foreign qualifications based on aligned vocational training standards. This would follow the example of a similar register that has already been developed for the Philippines and is under development for Indonesia. Since the MMPA does not create new pathways for migration and mobility, labour mobility from India to Austria continues to take place primarily through pre-existing schemes, such as the Austrian Red-White-Red Card. And although the agreement created momentum for the upscaling of certain recruitment initiatives, most recruitment continues to take place through a variety of public and private recruitment initiatives, institutional networks, and intermediary actors, most of which were established before the MMPA.

On the Austrian side, the Red-White-Red Card scheme for non-EU professionals is the primary policy instrument used to facilitate the recruitment of skilled workers from non-EU countries. It grants temporary residence with restricted access to the labour market and is eligible for highly qualified workers, skilled workers in shortage occupations, other key workers and start-up founders. With few exceptions, such as start-up founders, applicants must have a concrete job offer to apply for a work and residence permit under the scheme. After two years, and provided they meet specific requirements, holders of the Red-White-Red Card may apply for the Red-White-Red Card Plus, which grants temporary residence and unrestricted access to the Austrian labour market. Family members of Red-White-Red Card holders are also eligible to obtain the Red-White-Red Card Plus. The scheme is widely considered a key instrument for facilitating immigration of qualified non-EU workers. And granting access to the labour market for family members of these permit holders is regarded as good practice. Nonetheless, several challenges remain, including complex approval criteria as well as the potential for vulnerabilities through the card's linkage to one specific employer.

On the Indian side, the Ministry of External Affairs released a draft Overseas Mobility (Facilitation and Welfare) Bill, 2025, to replace the Emigration Act, 1983. The 1983 Emigration Act does provide safeguards for emigrants, such as restricting recruitment to authorised agents or permit-based processes and establishing the Protector General of Emigrants (PGE) as an oversight mechanism. However, it is weakly enforced due to limited administrative capacity, which has led to unethical recruitment practices in the past. The 2025 draft Overseas Mobility Bill proposes strengthened oversight and reflects a policy shift from a narrow “clearance” model toward a broader governance framework that integrates protection, skill development, labour market matching, welfare safeguards, and inter-ministerial coordination into a more facilitative mobility regime.

#### **4. Good practices**

In the course of the research, a range of interesting recruitment practices were identified. These include, for example: a partnership agreement between the province of Burgenland and the Dioceses of Eisenstadt and Kanjirapally, signed in March 2024 and building on a partnership between both Dioceses dating back to the early 1980s; a recruitment initiative of the private care home operator Senecura; and a cooperation between the Austrian Technical University of Leoben and Indian partner universities that aimed at recruiting Indian students in response to declining enrolment rates. While the majority of the analysed recruitment initiatives did not perceive a

strong direct impact of the MMPA, this university cooperation gained momentum during a state visit linked to the 2023 MMPA. This contributed to the upscaling of the initiative into a broader 2024 cooperation agreement between TU Austria (an alliance of Austria's three leading technical universities) and partner universities in India, supported by funding from the Austrian Ministry of Science and focused on the recruitment of students from India to the participating Austrian universities.

A recent letter of intent furthermore foresees the implementation of a pre-check register facilitating the mutual recognition of occupational skills. Already in place for the Philippines and under development for Indonesia, this has been referred to as a good practice in the course of the research.

## 5. Key takeaways

India is a key origin country for skilled non-EU workers in Austria. Talking to the stakeholders in India, the MMPA - though modest in scale - is strategically relevant, offering relative stability, safety, and access to EU mobility. Nonetheless, despite a strong alignment of labour demand and supply, mobility along the corridor remains only loosely institutionalised, with a mix of public and private recruitment initiatives competing for talent. In an attempt to navigate structural challenges around language learning, qualification recognition and integration, these largely network-based initiatives involve actors on both sides of the corridor, including provincial authorities, public and private employers, recruitment agencies and (partly church-based) intermediaries. Beyond the mobility of skilled professionals, student migration from India has also gained importance, emerging as a long-term talent pipeline for Austria. And while weak migration governance measures, specifically when it comes to the regulation of private recruiters in India, have led to unethical recruitment practices, a recent bill proposes strengthened oversight mechanisms.

The 2023 Comprehensive Migration and Mobility Agreement deepens cooperation between India and Austria, inter alia concerning the exchange of information on existing legal migration pathways and deepened cooperation in the area of skilling. While it has already given momentum to existing recruitment initiatives, a recent letter of intent has set to further operationalise the agreement in the areas of dual vocational training, skills development, and qualification recognition. The development of a pre-check register is foreseen with the aim to facilitate the comparability of pre-assessed foreign qualifications.

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## About the Link4Skills project

Link4Skills is an EU-funded research and project addressing the global challenge of skill shortages and mismatches through innovative, sustainable solutions that foster fair skill utilization and exchange across continents.

Focusing on Europe, Africa, Asia, and America, the project seeks to bridge the gap between skill supply and demand by facilitating re/up-skilling, promoting automation, and encouraging migration as policy options.

Link4Skills is creating an inclusive, participatory policy decision-making environment by integrating a diverse range of stakeholders, including EU decision-makers, inter-governmental institutions, national and subnational decision-makers, employers organizations, employees organizations, and civic society co-development institutions.

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