

Migration Skill Corridor Brief

Philippines-Germany

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June 2026

Centred on nurse mobility, the Philippines–Germany migration skill corridor is one of the world’s most institutionalised skilled migration partnerships. This brief examines the evolution of state-led and private recruitment, the role of ethical migration frameworks and Global Skills Partnerships, and the challenges of language acquisition, skills recognition, and workforce sustainability. It assesses how the corridor can better balance Germany’s labour market needs with the Philippines’ long-term healthcare and development priorities.

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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The Link4Skills project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon research and innovation programme under grant agreement number 101132476

Key Messages

An established, nurse-centred corridor with a dual track of public as well as private recruitment: Since the 2013 Triple Win agreement between Germany and the Philippines, the corridor has become one of the most institutionalised nurse migration pathways worldwide, with cooperation now extending to Global Skills Partnerships (GSPs) and new memoranda of understanding covering skilled occupations beyond nursing. This has contributed to making the Philippines currently the fourth largest origin country among skilled labour migrants in Germany

State-to-state agreements raise ethical standards, although most nurses migrate via private channels: While Triple Win and GSPs set high benchmarks for ethical, state-led recruitment, most Filipino nurses in Germany now arrive via private recruitment, where practices vary widely, making corridor-wide standards and enforcement increasingly important.

Triple Win is contested and negotiated: While the governments of both Germany and the Philippines frame the corridor as a win for multiple stakeholders, including employers and migrants themselves, ongoing debates about brain drain, health care system sustainability in the Philippines, cost sharing, and discrimination show that mutual benefit cannot be taken for granted and requires continued negotiation, monitoring, and greater investments particularly in the Philippines.

Language and recognition bottlenecks make Germany less attractive than English-speaking destinations: German language requirements and demanding recognition procedures raise quality but also cause high attrition and perceived downgrading of Filipino qualifications, making Germany less attractive than some English-speaking destinations.

Global Skill Partnerships (GSPs) link migration to training investments but remain small relative to outflows: GSPs channel part of the demand for Filipino nurses into concrete investments in labs, curriculum adaptation, language training and faculty exchange, strengthening local training capacity in Filipino healthcare training institutions. Yet the number of students and institutions reached so far is modest compared to the scale of nurse emigration, so the benefits remain concentrated in a few pilot sites.

The Filipino diaspora in Germany is a key actor in integration and advocacy: Well-organised Filipino nurse associations and individual returnees influence recruitment norms, give integration support and programme design, offering feedback to both government and employers and highlighting gaps in fairness, recognition and everyday working conditions.

1. Executive summary

The Philippines-Germany migration skills corridor is an established but evolving partnership centred on nurse mobility, with state-led cooperation since 2013 but with a growing role for private recruitment agencies. The Philippines is currently the fourth largest origin country among skilled labour migrants in Germany. For Filipino nurses in Germany, in particular, it can be estimated that two-thirds entered via private recruitment. The corridor can be best described as a *co-governed and strategically planned type*.

The corridor's main strength is that it is not reliant solely on market forces, which likely makes it safer and more predictable. State cooperation has created a framework for recruitment, language preparation, deployment, post-arrival support, and skills recognition. This is reinforced by strong institutional migration governance support in the Philippines through the Department of Migrant Workers (DMW) and aligned agencies, which shapes the corridor around worker protection and regulated deployment.

At the same time, the corridor is marked by structural contradictions: Germany sees Filipino nurses primarily as a 'solution' to persistent shortages in healthcare workers, while the Philippines is balancing Filipino labour mobility, remittances, and migrant protection against domestic nursing shortage and the sustainability of its own healthcare system. For this reason, the corridor is frequently presented as ethical and mutually beneficial, but the distribution of benefits may be uneven and contested.

A second contradiction concerns governance: The Triple Win Agreement and Global Skills Partnerships (GSPs) set higher standards for fair recruitment, but two-thirds of Filipino nurses in Germany arrive through private recruitment channels rather than through a state-led track. The reasons appear to be higher financial support and quicker processing through private recruitment. This suggests that scale currently still depends and will likely depend on private recruitment, even if ethical legitimacy is largely associated with the state-led channel.

Three bottlenecks appear to constrain the corridor: First, German language acquisition remains the most visible barrier for applicants and is a major source of attrition. Second, recognition procedures in Germany remain slow, bureaucratic, and are often experienced as downgrading Filipino nursing qualifications. Third, lengthy administrative procedures on both sides make the corridor less competitive than English-speaking destinations, and result in frustration and dropouts (including onward migration) among motivated and highly-skilled Filipino nurses.

Policy should push towards further deepening the corridor. This can be done through keeping the ethical and institutional strengths of the state-led model while making recognition easier, especially for graduates of GSPs whose curricula already align with German standards. It also requires better alignment of incentives during language training (for example by expanding stipends for those in the state-led track), investing more substantively in training capacity in the Philippines, and involving bottom-up diaspora and migrant voices more systematically in corridor governance and evolution.

2. Migration dynamics

The corridor is best described as established and re-emerging. Filipino nurses were already being recruited to Germany from the 1960s and 1970s, but the current phase of the corridor was consolidated through the 2013 bilateral nurse recruitment agreement under the Triple Win programme. Given the involvement of Catholic hospitals in the recruitment of nurses, the

corridor can be described as both a ‘post-missionary recruiting corridor’ and (given the new “triple win” twist in the recruitment) also a ‘new strategic skill mobility partnership corridor’.

Healthcare workers, particularly nurses, dominate the corridor. The migration flow is highly skilled and feminised, although recent policy discussion has opened space for additional sectors, including electrical and mechanical workers, plumbers, hospitality workers/cooks, and other medium-level skilled occupations.

The volume of movements of nurses has steadily grown over time: Based on Philippine data, deployment to Germany grew from only four in 2013, to 971 in 2019, to 1,604 in 2021, before declining to 1,173 in 2022. By 2022, it was estimated that there were around 6,000 Filipino nurses in Germany, one-third of whom came via Triple Win and the other two-thirds via private recruitment. This shows that the corridor is increasingly dual-track. Triple Win remains the flagship model, but private recruitment has been the key to scaling the corridor because recruitment agencies are able to reach more applicants and, importantly, are able to provide allowances while nurses study the German language. This is important because pre-departure language training sometimes stretches over several months, creating income pressure for applicants who are frequently supporting families. It also creates financial insecurity and dropouts of financially less affluent but often highly motivated or skilled candidates.

Germany remains attractive but not necessarily the first-choice destination for Filipino nurses. The United States and other English-speaking countries such as Canada and Australia are typically preferred because of language, family, and Filipino community networks, and higher salaries, while Gulf countries are more accessible because they impose fewer requirements. Germany thus competes globally for Filipino nurses and cannot assume that demand for skilled nurse migration easily translates into decisions favoring migration to Germany specifically.

3. Policies and agreements

The Philippines-Germany migration skill corridor is characterized by a dense but still-evolving policy architecture. The key instrument is the 2013 Triple Win Agreement. It was originally implemented through the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA, since merged with six other migration-related agencies into the Department of Migrant Workers in 2022) and Germany’s Federal Employment Agency (BA) via its International Placement Services (ZAV). This agreement created a joint framework for recruitment, worker protection, and implementation oversight through a joint committee or working group.

The corridor expanded after 2013. In 2016, the Philippine government allowed licensed private recruitment agencies to recruit nurses to Germany under certain conditions, including no placement fees for applicants and employer responsibility for several migration-related costs (including preparatory German language training, visa, and airfare). In 2022, a memorandum of understanding extended cooperation to other health professional and selected skilled occupations (electrical mechanics and fitters, electronics servicers, cooks, hotel receptionists, waiters, and plumbers and pipe fitters).

The GSPs expanded recruitment by starting it earlier in the career path. Recruitment now begins during regular nursing education in the Philippines and includes German language training, curriculum and pedagogy adaptation as well as faculty and technology exchange. Choosing the “abroad track” can eventually lead to employment in Germany. In principle, GSPs are meant to mitigate brain drain concerns by strengthening training capacity in the Philippines (via the “home

track”) while preparing nurses more effectively for employment in Germany. This includes guaranteed and accelerated skills recognition.

In practice, the policy architecture is still perceived as uneven. On the Philippine side, the labour emigration system and procedures are highly regulated and protection-oriented, which is sometimes perceived on the German side (employers and public authorities) as complex and burdensome. On the other hand, German visa procedures, bureaucracy, and fragmented recognition systems are viewed on the Philippine side as major constraints that reduce the corridor’s efficiency and attractiveness.

While the broader transnational normative framework promotes fair and ethical recruitment, this characterization is sometimes contested. Triple Win is frequently presented, especially by state actors, as the ‘gold-standard’ arrangement. Structural economic inequalities often remain outside of the scope of such programmes – leading to only a modest number and ethical outcomes. As reported above, most nurse recruitment still occurs through private channels – this includes private recruitment or personal networks which are prone to exploitation, fraud, and misinformation. Practices vary widely, with some private recruiters seeing the framework as difficult to operationalize and expensive to comply with.

More broadly, the corridor highlights the fact that even strong bilateral governance does not necessarily lead to continuous high migration flows or fully ethical outcomes within one corridor. The mature, highly institutionalised corridor on both sides demonstrate how a ‘shared goal’ can positively shape and set up transnational structures and frameworks. At the same time, it co-produces a certain discourse on ‘ethical recruiting’ that many actors invoke, even though what this means in practice often remains opaque (Hanrieder & Janauschek 2025). In the German context, the ‘trail-pioneering’ function of GSPs and Triple-Win is frequently mentioned. On the one hand that implies that state-led projects and initiatives provide best practices and establish joint frameworks and structures. At the same time it ‘pressures’ private actors to follow the ethical/development-oriented agenda. Yet, incidents of unethical and illegal practices during private recruitment and at the work environment remain, such as non-transparent or high costs for language courses and documentation, incomplete or misleading information about taxes, living costs, and job content, and poaching that encourages contract breaches with ethical employers. These experiences underline that bilateral agreements alone are not sufficient to control the expanding and dynamic recruiting landscape. Strong national frameworks and binding ethical regulations are still needed.

4. Good practices

- 1. Sustained bilateral state cooperation:** The Philippines-Germany case shows that formal agreements, technical working arrangements, and continuous intergovernmental communication ‘at eye level’ can create a more predictable and protection/rights-oriented corridor than purely market-driven recruitment frameworks. This is notably important in a highly regulated profession such as nursing, where recruitment, deployment, and skills recognition must be linked rather than treated as separate issues.
- 2. Global Skills Partnership model:** GSPs integrate German language training, curriculum adaptation, case-based teaching, and exposure to German care contexts (including ‘basic care’ as job responsibility) during nursing education in the Philippines, while also bringing equipment, faculty development, and potential spillover to students who will not migrate. The new requirement of GSPs students being required to work at least one year in the Philippines prior to departure is also a positive development. This programme obligation

mitigates the risk that only the destination country eventually benefits from the skills development investments— not just the origin country that actually provided most of the education. To date, two cohorts from a partner university—18 nurses in the first batch and about 40 in the second—have completed this GSP track and are now working in Germany, illustrating the model’s limited current scale. But, while small in scale and highly resource-/cost-intensive, GSPs are still one of the few examples of trying to connect migration with skill development in a genuine sustainable manner rather than treating the Philippines only as a labour source.

3. **Diaspora and returnee involvement:** The corridor offers examples of Filipino nurses and diaspora organisations in Germany becoming important and increasingly recognized voices on integration, rights, and programme design and evaluation. It also provides examples of how returnees can serve as teachers, mentors, and guides to new cohorts of nurses. This can improve orientation, the management of expectations, and the broader legitimacy of corridor governance.

5. Areas for improvement

Skills Recognition Reform: German skills recognition process is perceived by Filipino nurses as slow, too bureaucratic, and oftentimes devaluing Filipino qualifications. It often treats a Philippine bachelor’s degree in nursing as equivalent to a German vocational qualification, focuses on identifying “deficits” such as basic care rather than recognising additional medical content, and can require months of adaptation measures or exams while nurses work below their skill level and income expectations. For GSPs participants in particular, recognition should be streamlined through pre-agreed pathways that reduce duplication and shorten the period in which nurses are de facto downgraded.

Language Training Improvement: While Germany’s language requirement is a core quality safeguard, it also makes the corridor less competitive than some alternative destinations. This can be mitigated by expanding stipends or living support during language training in state-led recruitment, decentralised provision outside Metro Manila, and improved expectation management about timelines, living costs/taxes, and the realities of nursing work in Germany.

Raising the Ethical Bar for Private Recruitment: Private recruitment now plays a major role in scaling nurse migration to Germany, but practices still vary widely. Building on the standards of Triple-Win and the Philippine licensing regime, Germany and the Philippines should agree on corridor-wide minimum rules for all recruiters, including: clear limits on what can be charged to nurses and what must be borne by employers; standardized, written information templates on taxes, living costs, job content and recognition steps; joint monitoring of agencies through audits and occasional unannounced inspection; and accessible complaint and redress procedures in both countries that allow nurses and employers to report misrepresentation, coercion, or poaching without fear of retaliation.

Making Benefits More Tangible for Philippines: While GSP is a promising start for ethical and development-oriented skilled labour migration governance, destination-led investments in training infrastructure and wider healthcare-system corridor capacity remain limited relative to the scale of nurse outflows from the Philippines. If the corridor is to remain defensible as an ethical and fair partnership, Germany should support larger and more explicit and binding investments in training capacity, digital infrastructure, and faculty development in the Philippines. This should include scaling up GSP-style partnerships beyond a handful of nursing schools, co-financing digital infrastructure and technology and skills transfer in hard-to-reach campuses. Germany should also support geriatric-care curriculum development at the Philippines to better meet both Philippine and German demographic needs.

Sources and references

This corridor brief is based upon interviews conducted between February and August 2025. For the migration skill corridor Philippines – Germany, 37 expert interviews were conducted by the Link4Skills Philippines-Germany team, including 10 corridor-specific interviews. These included at the policy level decision-makers, politicians, executives or employees of administrations, ministries, institutions or agencies at various governmental levels, and practitioners and stakeholders at the implementation level, including public or private employment/recruitment agencies, language or professional training centers, implementing institutions and organisations, professional chambers, trade unions, welfare and civil society organisations, migrant communities and returnee associations, and employers/companies. This data has been complemented with documents, statistics and studies.

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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 organisations, employees organisations, and civic society co-development institutions.

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June 2026



The Link4Skills project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon research and innovation programme under grant agreement number 101132476