

Migration Skill Corridor Brief

India - Netherlands

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Drawing on 24 stakeholder interviews and desk research, this brief analyses the India-Netherlands migration skill corridor. The corridor - which emerged following the introduction of the Netherlands' Highly Skilled Migrant Scheme in 2004 - is characterised as predominantly highly skilled and private-sector led. Though relatively new, the corridor is well established, with India representing the most important origin country for highly skilled migrants to the Netherlands. Migration is largely demand-driven and shaped by employer needs rather than formal bilateral agreements. While the corridor functions effectively for highly skilled migrants, it remains underdeveloped for medium-skilled mobility and is constrained by institutional bottlenecks and policy ambiguities.

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 North America. 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-Netherlands migration skill corridor is characterized by highly skilled mobility, especially in STEM, IT, and limited initiatives in healthcare (Reinold et al., 2026). It is an established but ad hoc and private sector-driven corridor, with limited direct state-led agreements (Engbersen & Reinold, 2026). Indian migration to the Netherlands accelerated after the 2004 introduction of the Netherlands' Highly Skilled Migration Scheme also known as knowledge migration scheme (*Kennismigrantenregeling*), 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 (Reinold et al., forthcoming). The India–Netherlands corridor is a demand-driven, employer-led system that performs efficiently for highly skilled migrants but remains structurally narrow for other skill categories. The corridor provides high-value opportunities for a limited segment of highly skilled workers but lacks accessible pathways for medium-skilled mobility and structured institutional support.

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 proposals for restrictions (e.g., cuts to the 30% rule, curbing the inflow of international students, 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 has dropped sharply since 2023 due to a slowdown in vacancies, tighter political debates on migration, and declining Dutch competitiveness. Family migration, however, has 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 BIG¹ 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 2025.² This is likely due to the challenges identified in this report, political insecurities and recent labour market developments.³ At the same time, strengthened EU-India relations promise increased skill mobility from India to the European Union.⁴ It will be interesting to observe what exactly these opposing trends mean for the future Indian-Dutch migration skill corridor.

¹ Mandatory Dutch public register for healthcare professionals to confirm their qualifications and allow them to practice independently.

² <https://www.cbs.nl/en-gb/news/2026/06/population-growth-slows-for-third-consecutive-year>

³ 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/>

⁴ <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/nri/study/india-eu-seal-landmark-mobility-pact-indian-professionals-students-set-to-benefit/articleshow/127642725.cms>

2. Migration dynamics

Indian migration to the Netherlands has developed into one of the most significant extra-European migration corridors, characterised primarily by highly skilled mobility and increasing settlement tendencies. Indians currently constitute the largest group of third-country nationals in the Netherlands and are particularly concentrated in major knowledge-economy regions such as Amsterdam–Amstelveen and Eindhoven’s Brainport area. The expansion of this corridor coincided with the introduction of the Highly Skilled Migration Scheme (*Kennismigrantenregeling*) in 2004, after which Indian labour migration grew steadily, reflecting both employer demand and policy-enabled mobility pathways. In fact, Indian migration always made up a significant share of highly skilled migration in general.

Statistical trends show strong growth of Indian migration up to 2022, followed by a clear decline. Knowledge migration from India fell from around 6,500 arrivals in 2022 (accounting for 24.8% of all knowledge migrants) to approximately 3,420 (21.5% of all knowledge migration) in 2024, representing a reduction of about 50% compared to 2022 and 29.1% between 2023 and 2024. This decline coincided with reduced labour demand, higher salary thresholds, and a more restrictive migration climate. In contrast, family migration increased and, by 2023, exceeded labour migration for the first time, suggesting a shift from temporary labour inflows toward more settlement-oriented migration patterns. At the same time, other mobility streams remain important: Indian students constitute one of the largest non-EU student groups. In 2024, 8.2 % of student visas were obtained by Indians (1,825 out of 22,330); at TU Delft, Indians represent the second-largest non-EU group, including around 700 MSc students and 200+ PhD candidates.

Indian migrants are predominantly active in IT, engineering, consultancy, finance, and other STEM occupations, often entering through intra-corporate transfers via large multinational firms before transitioning to longer-term residence statuses. Community consolidation and increasing family settlement indicate longer durations of stay compared to earlier patterns of temporary mobility. The corridor is further shaped by historical migration layers, notably the presence of approximately 180,000 Hindustani Surinamese residents of Indian origin, which contributes to dense social infrastructures and facilitates integration pathways for newer migrants. Overall, the empirical evidence suggests a maturing migration corridor marked by diversification of entry channels, declining recent labour inflows, and a gradual transition toward longer-term settlement dynamics.

3. Policies and agreements

The migration relationship between India and the Netherlands is characterised by a limited formal bilateral migration framework and a strong reliance on economic cooperation and private-sector dynamics. While diplomatic and economic ties between both countries are generally strong, there are currently no specific state-led agreements directly regulating labour or skilled migration. Migration has therefore developed largely through company relocation, investment flows, and broader economic relations rather than through dedicated migration partnerships.

A key formal pillar is the Agreement on Social Security between India and the Netherlands, which enables the portability of social security benefits and prevents double payment or gaps in coverage. In addition, broader fiscal arrangements play an important indirect role. The Netherlands’ extensive system of double taxation treaties, including with India, increases its

attractiveness for multinational companies and thereby encourages the relocation of firms and employees. These economic frameworks have been central in shaping migration flows, particularly among highly skilled professionals.

The most important migration-specific instrument is the Highly Skilled Migrant Scheme. This policy significantly simplified entry procedures for highly skilled workers and allowed accompanying spouses easier access to residence and employment, expanding migration beyond IT specialists to engineers, researchers, and other knowledge workers.⁵ Additional instruments include the Orientation Year visa for international graduates and the 30% tax ruling, which offers temporary tax advantages to highly skilled migrants (Timm, Giuliadori & Muller 2022). Although these policies strengthened the attractiveness of the Netherlands, recent reductions in the 30% ruling to the disadvantage of recipients have raised concerns about declining competitiveness for international talent.

Institutionally, migration is closely connected to innovation and investment policy. Actors such as the Ministry of Economic Affairs, the Netherlands Foreign Investment Agency (NFIA), the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO), and municipalities support Indian firms in establishing themselves in the Netherlands. Initiatives such as the Netherlands Point of Entry, start-up visas, and the Indian-Dutch Start-up Link, alongside Memoranda of Understanding with Indian regions like Karnataka, facilitate entrepreneurship, innovation exchanges, and business mobility. While these initiatives do not directly regulate migration, they create enabling structures that indirectly support talent mobility and corporate transfer migration.

In practice, the India-Netherlands corridor is largely private-led. Employers bear primary responsibility for recruitment, sponsorship, and practical implementation of migration policies. Large multinational companies, especially Indian IT firms, have acted as key migration enablers through intra-company transfers and international recruitment. Private initiatives have also experimented with recruiting workers in sectors such as healthcare and technical trades, though these efforts often face challenges related to qualification recognition, administrative complexity, and cultural adaptation.

A recurring issue is the institutional stalemate between public and private actors. Governments expect employers to take the initiative in labour migration, while small and medium-sized enterprises often lack the expertise and capacity to recruit internationally without clearer support frameworks. As a result, migration beyond highly skilled categories remains ad hoc and underdeveloped. Political debates on migration and concerns about policy misuse further constrain long-term strategic planning.

4. Good practices

The India-Netherlands corridor demonstrates several practices that contribute to its relative success in facilitating highly skilled migration.

⁵ It has a demand-led design, as private actors initially negotiated the scheme, which placed employer demand for workers at its core. The main criterion for admission is salary level (in 2025: 2,989 Euros per month for international graduates; 4,171 Euros for workers under 30; 5,688 Euros for over 30). The salary must be in conformity with salaries paid in the industry for that type of job.

A key strength is the employer-driven recruitment model, supported by the knowledge migrant scheme. This system allows companies to recruit international talent efficiently through recognised sponsorship procedures, ensuring a strong alignment between migration flows and immediate labour market needs. At the same time, this demand-driven approach is weakly embedded in long-term strategic planning

Another important practice is the reception and integration support provided by expat centres and international welcome services (i.e., non-profit government agencies established in all major cities and regions of the Netherlands). These institutions offer comprehensive assistance to migrants, including administrative support, information provision, and guidance on living and working in the Netherlands. Such services facilitate smooth integration and enhance the attractiveness of the country for international talent.

Educational mobility also plays a crucial role. Dutch universities actively attract Indian students, particularly in English-taught STEM disciplines, and provide pathways for transitioning into the labour market. This contributes to a steady supply of highly skilled workers.

Finally, strong business linkages between India and the Netherlands, particularly in IT and technology sectors, create a self-reinforcing system of mobility. The presence of Indian companies and diaspora networks further facilitates recruitment and integration processes.

5. Areas for improvement/Key take aways

Despite its strengths, the India-Netherlands corridor faces several challenges that limit its effectiveness and inclusiveness.

First, there is a need for greater strategic coordination between public and private actors. The current system relies heavily on employers, while governments provide limited guidance. This creates a “stalemate” in which both sides expect the other to take the lead; a long-term strategy for labour migration is lacking.

Second, pathways for medium-skilled migration remain underdeveloped. Existing policies are primarily geared towards highly skilled migrants, leaving sectors such as healthcare and technical occupations underserved. Addressing this gap requires targeted programmes and more flexible regulatory frameworks.

Third, administrative barriers - such as complex procedures for gaining sponsorship and recognition of qualifications - pose challenges, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises. Simplifying these processes could enhance access to international talent.

Fourth, integration challenges, including housing shortages and limited support for accompanying partners, affect migrant retention. Addressing these issues is essential for maintaining the attractiveness of the Netherlands.

Finally, policy uncertainty and restrictive migration discourse may undermine the long-term sustainability of the corridor. A more stable and forward-looking policy environment is needed to support continued growth and development.

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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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