

Migration Skill Corridor Brief

India – Germany

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The India-Germany migration skill corridor - predominantly shaped as a highly skilled corridor - has recently shifted focus increasingly towards sector-/occupation-specific type, structured through long-term skills mobility partnerships with strong private involvement. Driven by labour shortages and supported through extensive bilateral cooperation, the corridor has expanded beyond traditional high-skilled migration in STEM fields to a rise in student migration and growing recruitment in healthcare, technical, and industry fields (emerging). Access to language training, recognition issues, expectation mismatch, and weak regulation of private actors shape the migration flow outcome of the corridor's scale and quality.

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 Ame. 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–Germany migration skill corridor is one of the most institutionalised and mutually prioritised migration skill corridors currently linking India with a European destination. Along with private recruitment, self-placement, and student-led mobility, the India–Germany corridor is increasingly structured through bilateral agreements, state-supported recruitment programs, and medium-skilled and sector/occupation-specific initiatives. While traditional top destination countries, such as the UK, Canada, Australia, and the USA have recently tightened student and professional migration pathways, Germany’s liberalizing approach with schemes offering regular, safe, and legal pathways has gained increasing attractiveness among Indian skilled professionals, trainees, and students. Making Germany appear as an interesting alternative destination for skilled Indians, with the prospect of long-term settlement. Germany’s growing appeal rests less on language, which is still the corridor’s single largest barrier, but rather on the prospect of secure, long-term settlement: stable residence status, family reunification, and comparatively strong labour protections, underpinned by liberalised legal pathways such as the 2020 Skilled Immigration Act and the points-based Opportunity Card. This pull is amplified as traditional destinations for Indians tighten student and professional entry, and reinforced by an established and fast-growing Indian diaspora, now one of Germany’s largest non-European communities, with over 50,000 Indian students in 2024.

The 2022 Migration and Mobility Partnership Agreement (MMPA) between India and Germany provides a key formal framework for cooperation on issues of skilled migration, student mobility, ethical recruitment, recognition, and return. The agreement does not provide new legal migration schemes, but improves and streamlines the implementation of private-led or self-organized migration by setting-up or expanding transnational infrastructures and speeding up procedures. The 2020 Skilled Workers Immigration Act reforms and the 2024 Skilled Labour Strategy for India further reinforce India’s position as a German priority partner in terms of regulated international skilled migration recruitment. Bilateral recruitment agreements, notably the 2021 government-to-government agreement between Germany and the state of Kerala in healthcare (Triple-Win) and a similar agreement with the state of Telangana in 2023, followed.

The corridor is shaped by a hybrid governance structure: On the German side, actors such as the Federal Employment Agency (BA) and its International and Specialized Services (ZAV), the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ), Goethe-Institute, sectoral ministries, employers, professional chambers and the private educational and employment sector are involved. On the Indian side, national ministries provide the broad policy framework, while implementation depends heavily on subnational and intermediary actors, such as NORKA (the Non-Resident Keralites Affairs Department of the Government of Kerala) or the NSCD (the National Skills Development Corporation).

The strengthened bilateral relations had led to a sudden increase in private-led initiatives and investments in education/training and recruitment on both sides. The private sector usually works fast-paced with easy and flexible adaptation to changing conditions or requirements in comparison to slow-paced, bureaucratic public institutions or programs. Yet, they also raise concerns around high fees, transparency, misinformation, poor quality, and uneven recruitment standards. The MMPA does not address this, although Germany’s 2024 Skilled Labour Strategy for India recognises their growing importance.

The corridor is best understood as a *state-led but scale-constrained migration skill corridor*. Its strengths lie in ethical recruitment models, structured recognition pathways, and bilateral political commitment. Its weaknesses lie in limited program scale, long timelines, high language

thresholds, uneven private intermediation, and recognition issues, especially outside healthcare. In vocational and technical occupations, matching remains difficult because German employers often require highly specific skill profiles and formal qualifications that do not always map neatly onto Indian education and training systems.

2. Migration Dynamics

Migration between India and Germany has expanded rapidly over the past decade, transforming the corridor into one of Germany's top non-European skilled migration channels (Rajan & Joshi, 2026). While Indian migration to Germany historically remained relatively limited, recent labour shortages in Germany and increasing global skilled migration competition have resulted in changing migration flows and patterns (ILO, 2025).

The public efforts in terms of skilled migration have generated an increasing flow with India as top nationality among German labor, student and job seeking migration as well as the top three nationality among German vocational training migration¹. The number of Indian nationals in Germany generally increased from around 86,000 in 2015 to approximately 280,000 in 2025, with more than 152,000 Indians employed in jobs with social insurance contributions². The migration composition also diversified: Earlier flows were concentrated on high-skilled IT or STEM professionals with migration predominantly via the EU Blue Card pathway. Recently, migration increasingly occurs through multiple channels, including vocational training migration, job or trainee seeking migration (via the Opportunity Card), family reunification as well as professional or trainee recruitment in various sectors/occupations, notably in healthcare (established), STEM/IT (established), and trades, technical and industry fields (emerging). Student migration has emerged as one of the fastest-growing components of the corridor. Indian students now form the largest group of international students in Germany, numbering over 50,000 in 2024.

Healthcare migration remains the most structured and institutionalized segment of the corridor. Over the last years, the privatization of healthcare provision in India has partly resulted in increasingly precarious employment structures, which further encouraged the migration of nursing staff (Fender & Rahnoma, forthcoming). Recruitment is concentrated especially in Kerala, which has a long-standing migration infrastructure and established nursing mobility pathways towards various destinations. Programs such as Triple-Win actively promote regular recruitment with ethical standards and safeguarding mechanisms. Newer programs such as Global Skills Partnerships invest into mutual skills development, with technical and skills transfer at the origin.

Vocational migration in fields of trades, crafts, technical and industry fields, in contrast, is increasing, yet on small scale with less institutionalized and more fragmented channels, primarily due to difficulties in skills matching, recognition, and employer expectations. Medium-skilled migration into such non-regulated sectors or occupations usually requires highly specific skills dependent on (acute) employer demands. German employers search for high-skilled workers for quick 'employability'. Interest on the Indian side is high. German employers, however, are more hesitant and reluctant as they have to compromise in terms of language or technical requirements in order to reach employer-employee-match and scale up recruitment. The reason for this is the

¹ https://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/DE/Forschung/Migrationsberichte/migrationsbericht-2024.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=14

² <https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Gesellschaft-Umwelt/Bevoelkerung/Migration-Integration/Tabellen/einwanderungsgeschichte-staatsangehoerigkeit-staaten.html>

education and labor market institutions mismatch in respective professional fields between India and Germany.

3. Policies and agreements

India manages migration through a diversified portfolio of destinations with varying degrees of institutionalization. Germany represents one of India's *multi-partner portfolio corridors* characterized by a high degree of formalization and state involvement, particularly in healthcare. The India–Germany migration corridor is shaped by bilateral agreements, domestic legislative reforms, and institutional cooperation and co-governance mechanisms that all aim to facilitate regulated skilled migration.

The corridor's policy framework has developed incrementally rather than through a single reform. The main milestones are:

- 2019** – Germany's Skilled Immigration Act expands eligibility beyond narrowly high-skilled categories to vocationally trained workers, trainees, and job seekers. Further Amendments made in **2023**
- 2021** – First government-to-government healthcare agreement between Germany and the state of Kerala (Triple Win).
- 2022** – Migration and Mobility Partnership Agreement (MMPA) signed between India and Germany.
- 2023** – MMPA operationalised; Skilled Immigration Act amendments and the points-based Opportunity Card (Chancenkarte) take effect; the G2G healthcare model is extended to Telangana.
- 2024** – Skilled Labour Strategy for India launched (October), naming India a priority partner and, for the first time, acknowledging the role of private recruiters.
- 2026** – **German** Bundestag passes a law (26 March) to accelerate recognition of foreign healthcare qualifications, with the new rules due to enter into force on 1 November 2026.

The MMPA provides the overarching framework for cooperation on skilled migration, student mobility, ethical recruitment, return cooperation, and migration governance. It does not create entirely new migration pathways but improves and streamlines the implementation and coordination of existing mobility schemes. The agreement reflects Germany's strategic shift towards proactive labour migration governance. With the 2020 Skilled Worker Immigration Act and its subsequent 2023 amendments, skilled migration opportunities to Germany expanded beyond narrowly defined high-skilled migration to include vocationally trained professionals, language and recognition adjustment trainees, job and trainee seekers (Ullmann & Schwenken, 2024). New mechanisms, such as the Opportunity Card, introduced a points-based model that allows qualified workers to enter Germany for employment or trainee search and recognition processes even without prior work contracts. Indian nationals emerged as one of the largest applicant groups under this scheme. In addition, Germany strengthened its partnership approach through the Skilled Labour Strategy for India, launched in 2024, which explicitly identifies India as a priority partner in addressing skills shortages. Importantly, it also acknowledges the growing role of private recruitment agencies in facilitating migration from India, an issue that earlier bilateral frameworks had addressed only indirectly.

The corridor governance reflects a multi-level and multi-stakeholder structure involving public, semi-public/private, and private actors. On the German side, institutions such as the Federal Employment Agency (BA) and its International and Specialized Services (ZAV), the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ), Goethe-Institute, sectoral ministries, employers, professional chambers and the private educational and employment sector are involved in recruitment, language, intercultural or professional preparation or adjustment training, recognition, and integration. On the Indian side, governance is comparatively fragmented. National ministries such as the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE), and Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) provide the broader policy framework, but implementation frequently depends on subnational institutions and intermediaries. Subnational actors are particularly important in sector/occupation-specific recruitment. Semi-public/private actors, such as the Non-Resident Keralites Affairs Department of the Government of Kerala (NORKA) and the National Skills Development Corporation (NSCD) play an important role here. Through government-led programs such as Triple-Win, the state of Kerala coordinates ethical recruitment, language preparation, and migration facilitation for Keralite nurses migrating to Germany. German stakeholders view India's subnational institutional infrastructure of migration governance, such as in Kerala or Telangana, as highly sophisticated and professionalized in terms of established procedures and administrative reliability. Negotiations with other Indian states to extend the government-to-government collaborations are ongoing.

Sector/Occupation-specific programs also play an important role in operationalising migration agreements and increasing migration flow. They are the operational arm of the policies set out above, translating the MMPA and the 2024 Skilled Labour Strategy for India into concrete sector-specific recruitment channels. Besides Triple-Win in healthcare, skills mobility partnerships such as Hand in Hand for International Talents in electrical engineering, automation/mechatronics, metalworking/metal fabrication, mechatronics, hospitality/cooking, IT, civil engineering, sewer and track construction, APAL – Trainees from Asia and Latin America – Technology, and Global Skills Partnerships in healthcare represent Germany's attempts to develop structured and regular skilled migration recruitment models. While these programs offer attractive opportunities for its participants, they remain small-scale, patchy, costly and limited in their ethical outcomes (Schwenken & Ullmann, 2026).

Additional initiatives, such as the Indo-German Programme for Vocational Education and Training (IGVET II), focus on mutual skills development and the promotion of education vocational training system reforms with the involvement and counselling of German public and private education institutions. The Indo-German Initiative for Technical Education (IGnITE) initiative is another example for vocational training collaboration with the aim to closely link workforce planning and skills investments for the benefit of both the Indian and German labor and vocational training market.

4. Good practices

Ethical skilled migration through structured public programs: Programs such as Triple-Win provide models for ethical recruitment standards, including the employer-pays principle, transparent selection, and protection against exploitation. By embedding recruitment within a coordinated framework involving public employment agencies, subnational intermediaries, and employers, it reduces migrants' risks, while enhancing trust among destination-country stakeholders.

Integrated pathways linking skilling and migration: Another good practice is the systematic integration of training, recognition, and employment rather than treating them as sequential or isolated processes. In Triple-Win and Hand in Hand for International Talents, recognition procedures run parallel to language acquisition, enabling candidates to progress toward full professional status while already embedded in employment or training contexts. This approach reduces uncertainty for employers, shortens effective migration timelines, and improves retention outcomes.

Subnational intermediation and trust-based co-governance: The prominent role of subnational education, employment and migration institutions represents a promising approach. Such institutions bridge governance gaps between national policy frameworks and local implementation realities. Their familiarity with local communities, combined with institutional credibility on the destination side, enhances compliance with ethical standards and reduces reputational risk. In Kerala, for example, NORKA Roots has become German recruiters' preferred partner over central-government offices, coordinating ethical recruitment, language-training arrangements and migration facilitation for Malayalee nurses under Triple Win; the Telangana Overseas Manpower Company performs a comparable role in Telangana. This is why subnational engagement is viewed especially favourably in healthcare, where reputational and ethical concerns are paramount.

Sector-/occupation-specific programs for strategic workforce planning: The India-Germany corridor is increasingly shaped by recruitment of various migration types and sectors/occupations. This diversification is promising as it opens avenues for skilling and migration across social hierarchies and socio-economic discrepancies and, thereby, prevents to reproduce structural or regional inequalities. Investments into atypical sectors or occupations for skilled migration are particularly noteworthy as they open new migration opportunities for a large, medium-skilled population cohort that has not received any targeted skilled migration policies so far. Hand in Hand for International Talents extends state-led recruitment into vocational fields such as electronics, mechatronics and automation, metalworking, hospitality and catering, and IT, while the APAL pilot targets vocational trainees and supports selected partner schools in India to bring students up to B1-level German before departure.

5. Areas for improvement

Bridging programs to facilitate high-quality language training: Language proficiency remains one of the largest barriers within this corridor. Most programs require B1 or B2 language certification prior to migration. Limited nationwide teaching capacities, uneven training quality with high failure rates, and examination delays significantly restrict access. Stakeholders reported on a growing number of candidates who independently invest considerable time and money into private on-site or online German language programs, but do not succeed in final exams, leaving many 'talents' within the India–Germany corridor stranded between migration aspirations and labour-market realities. Private or public initiatives are required for fast and pragmatic bridging programs – otherwise these stuck cohorts will decide for alternative destinations.

Expansion and effective implementation of comprehensive private sector control: Although the private sector has become central in facilitating training and migration to Germany, regulatory oversight remains limited. As government-to-government channels remain small in numbers, the majority of skilled migration runs via private or direct channels. In order to scale up the corridor, investments are required that expand the regulation and institutionalization of fair migration governance on both sides. Otherwise, private actors continue to take advantage of vulnerable

migrants in terms of cost distribution, training quality, knowledge asymmetry, and recruitment treatment as they know they will not face consequences. Random samples of ethical compliance oversight or precedent cases of private actor sanctions can have signalling force.

Promotion of continuous training in crafts, trades, technical and industry fields: While healthcare recruitment pathways are relatively standardised, recruitment in vocational training in crafts, trades, technical and industry fields is limited by skills matching and recognition barriers. German employers predominantly seek highly specific skill profiles and often reject candidates who do not fully align with company/business-specific technical or experiential requirements. A paradigm shift is necessary in these sectors/occupations from quick ‘employability’ towards sustainable promotion of continuous training – also for (skilled or forced) migrants.

Data and Sources

This corridor brief is based upon interviews conducted between February and August 2025. For the migration skill corridor India – Germany, 36 expert interviews were conducted by the Link4Skills India-Germany team, including nine 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 organizations, professional chambers, trade unions, welfare and civil society organizations, 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 organizations, employees organizations, and civic society co-development institutions.

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